

## **Chūgoku Nature Trail: Kawadoko to Ikkōganaru**

### Daisen Falls

Revered in ancient times as the home of a Shinto deity, Daisen Falls is the paramount waterfall on Mount Daisen. Its headwaters flow from the Tengugamine and Karasugasen peaks, which flow together to form the Kasechi River. The waterfall plunges a total of 42 meters down two drops. The break between drops is caused by a particularly resilient layer of volcanic rock, which has resisted the falls' powerful flow. In 1990, Daisen Falls was designated one of the top 100 waterfalls in Japan.

### Mt. Daisen

As the tallest mountain in the Chūgoku region, Mt. Daisen stands 1,729 meters above sea level, a striking landmark when seen from the nearby coast. Its precipitous northern face stretches into a 2-kilometer cliff wall that ranges from Misen Peak (1,709 m) eastward along the peaks of Kengamine (1,729 m) and Tengugamine (1,710 m) and finally ends at Sankohō Peak (1,516 m). The northern wall's many deep furrows resemble a Japanese folding screen, for which it is called a "folding screen cliff" (*byōbu iwa*). Snow often remains throughout the summer in the ridgeline's uppermost crevices.

### Ōyasumi Pass

This 9-kilometer trail section through Ōyasumi Pass joins with part of the former Kawadoko Road, one of four paths that historically led to Daisenji Temple. When Shugendō, a sect of Esoteric Buddhism, was at its height early in the Heian period (794–1185), the Kawadoko Road served as an artery between the Shugendō temple on Mt. Mitoku (east of Kurayoshi) and the central Shugendō training center on Mt. Daisen. As Daisenji's prominence grew in subsequent centuries, the Kawadoko Road was heavily traveled. Sections of 400-year-old cobblestone paving still mark the trail today.

### Mt. Senjō

Located to the north along Mt. Daisen's volcanic rim, Mt. Senjō (615 m) is a smaller peak with a significant past. During Shugendō's heyday, Senjō stood with Mt. Mitoku and Mt. Daisen as one of the "Three Peaks of Hōki," centers held to be sacred ground for ascetic practices.

When Emperor Go-Daigo escaped from his exile in the Oki Islands in 1333, he made the summit of Mt. Senjō a stronghold from which he successfully resisted the shogun's forces and reestablished control of the government in Kyoto.

### Ayugaeri Falls

Directly below the Daisen Falls suspension bridge is Ayugaeri Falls. Ayu (or sweetfish) are small fish that live in rivers and travel upstream in spring. The name *ayugaeri*, meaning “ayu turnabout,” comes from the belief that migrating ayu reach these falls and can swim no farther.

### Mt. Daisen Plants and Wildlife

The old-growth beech forest that encircles Mt. Daisen between 800 and 1,400 meters in elevation is one of the largest in western Japan. Japanese beech composes 50 to 60 percent of the forest, and oak, maple, and willow make up the remainder. The forest floor is covered with shrubs like spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) and viburnum, which feed and shelter more than 100 species of birds.

Beyond 1,400 meters, tall trees are replaced by dwarf species and alpine shrubs. Their blossoms attract over 120 species of butterflies, some of which are endangered. Near the summit is an 8-hectare forest of Daisen dwarf Japanese yew—the largest concentration of these shrubs in Japan and a Special National Natural Monument.