

### **Audio Guide: Hellish Vegetation**

As you get closer to the hot springs and begin to smell the sulfur in the air, it is easy to see why early visitors to this area called the bubbling pools *jigoku*, the Japanese word for “hell.” Pungent sulfurous steam, water temperatures of nearly a hundred degrees Celsius, and highly acidic soil—you might be wondering how plants could possibly live here. Yet, as you can see, there is a unique, thriving ecosystem all around you.

The plants that grow around the *jigoku* have adapted to this challenging environment. The tallest plant capable of growing here is the *akamatsu*, or red pine. There are also shrubs and several species of azaleas, such as the *miyama-kirishima*, which blooms with pink flowers in late April. Other plants include the oval-leaved lyonia, with its twisting red trunks, and the fruit-bearing sea bilberry, a low shrub in the same family as blueberries.

These plants can even survive right next to the bubbling water and gas vents. Here, you can see bunches of silver grass and tall rush grass—hardy plants that are often found in hot-spring areas like this.