

## **Recovery from Disaster**

Both nature, and the human beings within it are resilient in the face of natural disaster. Since the Heisei Eruptions of 1990–1995, communities in the eastern Shimabara Peninsula have recovered quickly. Debris was cleared, memorials were built, and the Heisei Shinzan Nature Center was established in 2003 to study the aftermath of the disaster and prepare for future eruption events. The strength and speed with which nature has recovered is especially encouraging to observe.

Over the course of the eruption event, the Taruki Plateau was directly hit multiple times by pyroclastic flow. The hot, fast-moving mixture of gas, rock, and ash devastated this area, which is just 2.5 km away from the summit of Mt. Heisei Shinzan (1,486 m). Photos of the scene taken shortly after the eruptions look as if they came from the surface of Mars: any plants not buried under meters of debris were incinerated by hot gas.

## **The Lone *Tabunoki* (*Machilus thunbergii*)**

A handful of plants, like the large, healthy tree you see before you, were able to survive the wildfire. This tree is a specimen of one of the world's largest laurel trees, *Machilus thunbergii*, called *tabunoki* in Japanese, which is native to Japan. The evergreen leaves of the *tabunoki* are large and densely packed, and these characteristics—along with a bit of luck—are likely what spared it from being crushed or catching fire in the pyroclastic flow.

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