

Ecological Recovery After the Heisei Eruptions

The Taruki Plateau has taken some time to recover from the Heisei Eruptions of 1990–1995. It was hit multiple times with pyroclastic flow—a fast-moving mixture of burning gas, rock, and ash—that billowed down the volcano. After the eruptions ceased in 1995, the whole area here looked otherworldly and was devoid of life. But that did not last long, with moss and grass returning soon after the earth had cooled. Volunteers began planting trees, and in 2003 the Heisei Shinzan Nature Center was established to study the aftermath of the disaster and prepare for future eruption events.

The recovery from the volcanic destruction has been remarkably swift, and the few trees that did survive have grown much larger than they likely would in the forest. Many native plants and animals have begun to flourish, and while the forest has not yet returned completely, it is growing taller each year.

Look for trees with thick trunks—those are the ones that resisted the debris and fire. Surrounding these few tough specimens are countless examples of plants that have regrown rapidly in the decades since the eruption. Follow the walkways surrounding the nature center to see these plants up close.

Many species native to the Shimabara Peninsula are adapted to the destruction caused by the volcanoes; they thrive in disturbed, igneous soil and quickly begin flowering and producing berries, which brings insects and birds back to the area. Larger plants like trees are not far behind, and in the decades since the eruption event, volunteers have been helping the ecosystem recover by planting them across the plateau.
