

## **Ikenohara Park**

The unique landscape of Ikenohara is all due to a stroke of luck. During the Meiji era (1868–1912), there were many sheep pastures in Unzen. The sheep could eat all the other plants but were unable to digest the region's native azaleas. As a result, these hardy flowering shrubs came to take over the area, thriving in the acidic soil at the base of the volcanoes. Although sheep are no longer raised here, the prefecture is working with a local non-profit organization to maintain the beautiful azaleas as a reminder of the past.

The most famous azaleas in Unzen are the *miyama-kirishima*: they bloom in May, covering the mountainside with pink, purple, and red flowers. The *yama-tsutsuji*, another species of azalea, blooms with reddish-orange flowers in June, ensuring at least several months of beautiful flowers.

The stone-paved walking paths that wind through the park are relatively flat, making this a good choice for a family stroll. The park offers spectacular views of Mt. Yadake (970 m), Mt. Myōken (1,333 m), and Mt. Heisei Shinzan (1,486 m).

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