

Hōbaru Azalea Garden

At the foot of Mt. Takaiwa (881 m), the southernmost of Unzen's peaks, the Hōbaru Azalea Garden is an inviting spot to relax before climbing the mountain.

Azaleas, called *tsutsuji* in Japanese, are prized in Unzen. In fact, the Kyushu azalea (*miyama-kirishima*) is known as the Unzen azalea on the Shimabara Peninsula. This flowering shrub, which thrives in the acidic soil at the base of the ancient volcanoes, is famed for the bright pink and purple flowers it produces in May.

Great efforts are made to keep this area an excellent spot for strolling and picnicking; caretakers frequently clear away any encroaching grasses or trees so that the beautiful azaleas can remain the focus. Farther up the hillside are platforms that offer panoramic views of the garden below and the mountains beyond.
