

## Hiking on Mt. Jo

Mt. Jo (369 m) is one of four mountains known collectively as Yotsuka-renzan (“four mountains”). The path up the mountain from the Akama trailhead is well maintained and has sturdy log steps. The trail provides views across the whole region, making it popular with climbers.

The remnants of stone walls near the summit mark the site of Tsutagatake Castle. It is believed to have been built by the Munakata family in the thirteenth century and was heavily fortified in 1560 to protect it from enemy attacks. The Munakata family ruled the region until the sixteenth century and served as the head priests of Munakata Taisha, the collective name for three shrines venerating the Three Female Deities of Munakata.

Visitors may see some rare plants and fungi on the way up the mountain. In summer, the yellow *kinugasatake* mushroom (*Phallus luteus*), distinguished by a lacy “skirt” that descends from the cap, grows in the dense forest near the base of the mountain. Further up the mountain are white varieties of this mushroom. *Tsuchiakebi* (*Cyrtosia septentrionalis*), an unusual type of orchid, grows in the forest. The red, pod-shaped fruit of the plant indicate it belongs to a variety known as mycoheterotrophic orchids, which feed on fungi rather than making nutrients through photosynthesis.

Munakata is situated in a basin, and the Yotsuka-renzan mountains are the most prominent natural landmark. Hikers can climb the mountains without special equipment, and it is possible to climb all four in one day.