

Introduction to Bandai Asahi National Park

Bandai Asahi National Park's scenic highlights include colorful lakes, towering peaks, and stark landscapes shaped by volcanic activity over the ages. Sites of both spiritual and scientific interest are also found in the park: Dewa Sanzan is considered one of Japan's most important religious sites, and Goshikinuma is a cluster of ponds studied for the array of colors in their waters.

Bandai Asahi is Japan's second largest national park, spanning 1,870 square kilometers across parts of Fukushima, Yamagata, and Niigata prefectures, in northeastern Japan.

The park is divided into three areas: Bandaiazuma-Inawashiro, Iide, and Dewa Sanzan–Asahi.

Bandaiazuma-Inawashiro

Bandaiazuma-Inawashiro's landscape was dramatically reshaped in 1888 by the violent eruption of Mt. Bandai (1,816 m). A powerful steam eruption caused one of the mountain's peaks to collapse; the debris dammed a river, flooded villages, and created hundreds of new ponds and lakes. The most spectacular of these is Goshikinuma, a group of around 30 colorful ponds whose waters are various shades of green, blue, yellow, and red. The ponds' appearance is affected by their mineral content, their plant life, and the scenery reflected on their surface.

Lake Hibara, on Mt. Bandai's northern flank, and Lake Inawashiro, to the south of the peak, are popular sites for camping and water activities.

Iide

Iide is a remote area of the park, surrounded by mountains. In the warmer months, its mountains, beech forests, and marshes make it a beautiful and peaceful place to hike. In winter, heavy snow makes much of Iide impassable. In warmer months, advanced climbers can try the challenging, multiday trail up Mt. Iide (2,105 m), surrounded by Bandai Asahi's unspoiled wilderness.

Dewa Sanzan–Asahi

Dewa Sanzan is the collective name of three sacred mountains: Mt. Haguro (414 m), Mt. Gassan (1,984 m), and Mt. Yudono (1,500 m). These peaks are purported to have a 1,400-year history as a center of Shugendo, an ancient tradition of mountain asceticism incorporating elements of both Buddhism and Shinto. The pilgrimage to all three mountains is symbolic of a journey through birth, death, and rebirth.

Mt. Asahi (1,870 m), to the south, is covered with beech forests and alpine plants. Its gorges, covered in snow even in summer, make for challenging hiking.