

Literature of Dewa Sanzan

The master haiku poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) was the most prominent literary figure in Japan to be inspired by Dewa Sanzan. *Oku no hosomichi* (The Narrow Road to the Deep North), a poetic travel diary in which Basho documented his trip through northeastern Japan, is widely considered one of the finest examples of Japanese literature and has been translated into several languages.

Basho's 160-day trip began in the spring of 1689, when he set out from his home in Edo (today's Tokyo). His journey, undertaken mostly on foot, was sometimes a treacherous one, with few paths and minimal accommodation along the way. When he reached the Dewa Sanzan area, he stayed for eight days and climbed Mt. Haguro (414 m), Gassan (1,984 m), and Yudono (1,500 m).

It was during his time on Mt. Haguro that Basho created poems that redefined haiku. He created the distinctive style of *fueki-ryuko*, meaning “constancy and change.” This is the concept whereby a haiku conveys the continuous change of nature throughout the seasons. This technique is now central to the art.

*arigata ya
yuki o kaorasu
kaze no oto*

*Oh how wonderful
The snow encapsulated
Echo of the wind*

While in the Dewa Sanzan area, Basho stayed in a temple in Minamidani, a valley near the foot of the San no Saka slope on the western flank of Mt. Haguro. The temple's crumbling remains still stand today. Elsewhere on Mt. Haguro, Basho is known to have eaten *shojin ryori*, vegetarian cuisine eaten by Buddhist monks, and written poems about the area. There is a monument to Basho on the mountainside and a statue of his likeness at the peak.