

## Mountain Treks

Sankan Sando is the pilgrimage to Mt. Haguro (414 m), Mt. Gassan (1,984 m), and Mt. Yudono (1,500 m), together known as Dewa Sanzan (“the three mountains of Dewa”). The journey, which typically takes two days, symbolizes the cycle of rebirth for followers of Shugendo, an ancient tradition of mountain asceticism incorporating elements of both Buddhism and Shinto.

The mountains are relatively low in elevation, but the walk is difficult. The pilgrimage thus requires planning and preparation, as with any mountain hike.

The summit of Mt. Haguro is accessible year-round by car. Hiking all three mountains is only possible between July and mid-September because of extreme weather conditions during the remaining months.

Mt. Gassan is particularly prone to variable weather. Its steep western side, which faces the Sea of Japan, is often buffeted by strong winds. The eastern slopes are covered with deep snowpack, and snow covers part of the mountain until the middle of summer. These harsh conditions make it necessary to plan climbs carefully. Gassan Visitor Center has several live feeds from cameras at various points on the trail, allowing hikers to observe and prepare appropriately for weather conditions before departing.

To protect against wind and chill, wear multiple layers, including warm, fast-drying clothing, waterproof outerwear, and hiking boots. Also, bring a fully charged phone and plenty of food and drink for the journey.

Camping in the mountains is prohibited, but there is plentiful accommodation along the route. A popular option are the *shukubo*, hostel-like lodgings where pilgrims have stayed for centuries.

Those ascending the mountains should take precautions to avoid encounters with the area’s Asiatic black bears. Carrying a bear bell alerts them of a human presence and typically keeps them away. In the unexpected event of encountering a bear, avoid startling them: do not run, shout, get close, or take a photo. Instead, move cautiously away from them, without turning your back.