

## **The Natural Diversity of Hakone**

More than half of all the plant species discovered in Japan can be found growing in Hakone, a sign of remarkable natural diversity. Approximately 30 of these plants are found only in the mountainous Fuji-Hakone area, which extends southeast from Mt. Fuji across Hakone toward Sagami Bay. This abundance of plant life is largely due to the area's complex topography, volcanic origins, and high annual rainfall.

Lake Ashi, the symbol of Hakone, never freezes over in winter thanks to its size and currents, allowing it to support a diverse underwater ecosystem. Lush forests of Japanese cedar and hinoki cypress grow around the lake's shores, the habitat of deer, wild boar, and other mammals, as well as many minuscule insects unique to the area. The variation at higher altitudes includes the fields of silvergrass (*susuki*) at Sengokuhara, a popular tourist destination when the grass turns silvery in mid-autumn, and the rocky slopes of Owakudani, where steam and gases heated by underground magma rise constantly into the air. That magma is also what powers Hakone's most profitable natural features; it keeps the area's many hot springs hot.