

## **The Hakone Geopark**

A geopark refers to a unified natural area with a significant geological heritage. Hakone received this designation in 2012, when the region's long history of volcanic activity, and the distinctive natural environment formed as a result, were recognized by the Japanese Geoparks Council. Hakone lies at the intersection of three tectonic plates, namely the Eurasian, Philippine Sea, and North American, and is also affected by the movement of a fourth, the Pacific plate. This has made the area a unique geological focal point for hundreds of thousands of years. Over that period, volcanoes have emerged and collapsed repeatedly, creating a complex topography distinguished by a rim of volcanic peaks around a giant crater called a caldera.

In Hakone, Owakudani, "Great Seething Valley," is the epicenter of ongoing volcanic activity. The valley took shape roughly 3,000 years ago, after the vast Hakone volcano's most recent massive eruption, and is located near the midpoint of the volcano. Its otherworldly landscape, complete with rising fumes and the unmistakable smell of sulfur, brings visitors face to face with nature's power. Owakudani also hosts the Hakone Geo Museum, where hands-on exhibits cover the area's geological origins in detail. To reach Owakudani, visitors can take the hiking trail that starts just outside this Center and ends next to the Geo Museum. The hike can be completed in less than an hour and a half.