

Goshikigahara Forest

Goshikigahara Forest is a flourishing ecosystem that covers over 3,000 hectares on the northwestern slope of Mt. Norikura. At lower elevations, wild plants and trees include deciduous trees such as beech, walnut, and oak, while higher up a variety of conifers, including fir and Japanese hemlock grow. Wildflowers like rhododendrons, magnolias, and monkshood touch the scenery with pink and purple. Many of the plants thrive in the forest despite being threatened elsewhere, thanks to strict policies that limit human impact.

The trails and even the roads leading to the forest are left unpaved to help preserve and protect the area and its wildlife. The number of tours per day is also limited to minimize disturbance to the environment. Five small rest lodges in the forest are equipped with bio-toilets that do not pollute the nearby rivers and streams. Additionally, all trash must be taken away when leaving the park.

Access to the forest is only possible on guided tours in groups of up to 10 people. Tours follow three distinct courses and are spaced out so that hikers' paths do not cross. The 6.7-kilometer Kamoshika course passes four large waterfalls, crossing the forest from north to south, while the Shirabiso course winds around mountain ponds and streams, leading to a terraced waterfall. The Gosuwara course passes through sections of forest that have remained almost completely untouched, ending at an elevation of 1,920 meters. Each course takes eight hours to hike in full, so tours start early in the morning although half-day tours are also available.

Most of the forest is owned by the city of Takayama, but is maintained in large part with assistance from relevant organizations. In the past, until about a century ago (around 1892–1918), copper and silver mining flourished in the area. It is said that at the height of activities (around 1907), there was a town with as many as 3,000 people, including miners and their families, living in the mountainous area. Following the closure of the mines after World War II, the land was purchased by the city, and the forest was saved from overdevelopment. The hiking courses were developed in response to the rising momentum toward sustainable use of the forest's rich natural environment, and public tours started in 2004.