

Joshin'etsukogen National Park - Mt. Tanigawadake Region

Joshin'etsukogen National Park was established in 1949. As of 2020, it is the fourth-largest national park in Japan, spanning 148,194 hectares of Gunma, Niigata, and Nagano Prefectures. Japan's national parks system was created in 1931 in response to widespread demand for a system to protect Japan's natural wilderness and the human communities that have formed as part of it. The diverse landscapes and myriad wildlife of Joshin'etsukogen perfectly fit the definition of a national park as "a landscape that is representative of Japan." Joshin'etsukogen's landscape includes impressive mountains like Mt. Asama (2,568 m) in the south and Mt. Naeba (2,145 m) in the north, as well as crater lakes, verdant marshland, brisk highlands, and numerous hot springs. For the sheer scale and variety of the park's natural environments, including mountains and highlands, the region has been called an "outdoor recreation world" for hiking, skiing, camping, and other outdoor activities.

The Tanigawa Mountain Range straddles the border between Gunma and Niigata Prefectures. The two peaks of Mt. Tanigawadake, Okinomimi (1,977 m) and Tomanomimi (1,963 m), were once regarded as the dwelling places of Shinto deities. When viewed from the south, the peaks perfectly resemble the ears of a cat, which is the origin of their name—the "two ears." The range was uplifted beginning some 4.4 million years ago, after which erosion by water, snow, and glacial movement has carved out its characteristic U-shaped valleys. The steep, craggy mountain faces created by this process make the mountain range a forbidding place for flora and fauna.

Mt. Tanigawadake (1,977 m) itself, though comparatively lower than many of the other mountain peaks in the national park, is known as a mecca for hikers and rock climbers. The area around Mt. Tanigawadake is counted among Japan's "three great rock faces," and the mountain has been popular with mountaineers since the early twentieth century. The first hiking paths originated as trails used by mountain ascetics. Hiking paths were first established during the 1930s, and several more have been added in subsequent years, including trails for both casual visitors and seasoned hikers. To facilitate easy travel to the mountain peaks, a ropeway linking the foothills to the mountain ridge at Tenjindaira was built in 1960 and has been upgraded several times.