

## **Hiruzen Hiking Trails**

Hiking in the Hiruzen Highlands offers panoramic views of sweeping grasslands and lush forests set against the majestic mountains of Daisen-Oki National Park.

Mt. Kami-Hiruzen (1,202 m), Mt. Naka-Hiruzen (1,123 m), and Mt. Shimo-Hiruzen (1,100 m) are collectively known as the Hiruzen Sanza, or simply as Mt. Hiruzen. An 11-kilometer trail traverses all three summits, with trailheads at the base of Mt. Kami-Hiruzen in the west and Mt. Shimo-Hiruzen in the east. The whole hike takes 7 to 8 hours to complete. A shorter and more popular option is to climb just Mt. Naka-Hiruzen, starting from a third trailhead at Shiogama Spring. This trail takes about two hours from start to summit. All of the trails rise about 600 meters in elevation.

The Hiruzen Sanza give superb views of the Hiruzen Highlands, with glimpses of the Sea of Japan to the north on clear days. In damp, cool weather, dense mountain mists sometimes collect in the Hiruzen Basin and result in a phenomenon known as an *unkai*, or “sea of clouds.” On such occasions, the valley is obscured and the surrounding peaks rise eerily from a white sea. About half a kilometer along the trail west of the Mt. Kami-Hiruzen summit, hikers will get the best view of Mt. Daisen, a massive dormant volcano in neighboring Tottori Prefecture.

Other seasonal highlights of the Hiruzen Sanza trails include pale-pink bamboo lilies in June, the spidery purple blooms of fawn lilies in May, and rustling fields of bamboo grass in summer, a quintessential image of the Japanese wilderness.