

Mt. Karakunidake: Summit

The 1,700-meter summit of Mt. Karakunidake is the highest point in the park, and the best place to survey the park's diverse geography.

Far to the west rises Mt. Kurinodake. It is one of the oldest mountains in the park, having formed around 200,000 years ago. To the south lies Lake Onamiike, a vast crater lake that is more than 1,200 meters above sea level. The lake was formed around 50,000 years ago, making it much younger than Mt. Kurinodake, but still three times as old as Mt. Karakunidake. On a clear day, the Sakurajima volcano in Kagoshima Bay can be seen far to the south.

To the southeast is Mt. Shinmoedake, where cooled lava from a 2017 eruption is still visible both pooled in the crater and as dark streaks on the mountainside. Beyond Mt. Shinmoedake stands Mt. Takachihonomine, the legendary site where the Shinto deity Ninigi no Mikoto, grandson of the deity Amaterasu Omikami, is said to have descended to the earth. Mt. Hinamoridake, renowned for its beautiful form, rises to the east.

Inside the Crater

Viewed from atop Mt. Karakunidake's rocky crater rim, where only hardier plants like Miyama-Kirishima azaleas (*Rhododendron kiusianum*) grow, the crater's interior seems a hidden world of its own—a lush green basin 900 meters across and 300 meters deep. After heavy rain, a small lake sometimes forms on the crater floor, even attracting deer to drink on occasion.

The basin is open to the northwest because of an eruption that took place millennia after Mt. Karakunidake was formed 17,000 years ago. This explosion crater gives the main crater its unique horseshoe-like shape, so that the mountain has a different face depending on what direction it is viewed from.