

Kochiyama Observatory

Kochiyama is a 280-meter peak overlooking the port town of Koniya on the southern end of Amami Oshima. A three-story observatory at the top offers panoramic views of the entire southern tip of the island and the strait between the group of islands further south. These islands—Ukejima, Yorojima, and Kakeromajima, which is the largest—are all covered with low forested hills and surrounded by sandy beaches. On a clear day, visitors can see as far as Tokunoshima, the second-largest island in the Amami Island chain, some 46 kilometers away.

Shades of Amami Oshima

The mountains around the observatory plunge sharply down to the calm waters of the Oshima Strait and the inlets of the ragged ria coast, which was created by submerged river valleys. Visitors can get a bird's-eye view of fishing boats plying the strait on the hunt for bonito, sea bream, and other fish, as well as the racks used for pearl cultivation and bluefin tuna farming. The observatory is well-known for the view of both forests and sea turning gold at sunset. From mid-January, another color attracts visitors to this area: the dark-pink blossoms of a grove of *hikanzakura* cherry trees bloom over a period of two to three weeks in the garden next to the parking lot. This is one of the earliest spots to view cherry blossoms in Japan.

Access

There is no public transport up to the observatory. Taxis are available from the port of Koniya to the closest parking lot, a 15-minute ride. The observatory is a five-minute walk from there, and walking sticks are available at the entrance to ward off *habu*, the venomous snakes found throughout the island. Hiking up the road from the Setouchi Tourist Information Center in town takes about 90 minutes.