

Boma Forest Road

The Boma Forest Road (Boma Rindo) is a 1,484-meter paved route that traverses the heavily forested region between the towns of Boma and Amagi that is part of the Amami Islands National Park. Built in 1977, the road passes through wild mountain territory that has remained free of commercial or residential development. The route is a living museum where rare plants and animals can be observed in their natural habitat. Like most of the island, this area is also home to the *habu*, a poisonous snake with markings that camouflage it well in the lush undergrowth. Since *habu* are given a wide berth by local residents, they can also be given credit for helping maintain the area in its natural state over the years.

Symbols of the Island

The *Amami no kuro-usagi*, or Amami black rabbit (also known as the Ryukyu rabbit), is the island's most popular animal, and a symbol of Tokunoshima. This short-eared, dark-furred rabbit has a long nose and long claws for digging nests, and is only found here and on neighboring Amami Oshima. The only daylight signs of this nocturnal herbivore are the small oval droppings found on the roadside and the gnawed leaves of the foliage close to the ground.

Sharp-eyed visitors may glimpse the tiny iridescent spot that marks the rare blue Japanese tiger beetle (*Cicindela ferriei ndigonacea*), a species only found on Tokunoshima. Another forest resident is the Amami tip-nosed frog (*Odorrana amamiensis*), named for its pointed snout. In late summer and autumn, the shrill, almost bird-like call of the *Oshima-zemi*, a type of cicada found only on the Amami Islands, echoes throughout the dense forest.

Lush and Varied Plant Life

Among the endemic plants is the *Ryukyu hana ikada* (*Helwingia japonica*). *Hana ikada* (flower raft) is a Japanese term for a fallen blossom floating in water and, befitting its name, the flowers of the plant emerge from the center of the leaves as if afloat on a green pond. There are also wild orchids, and several endangered species of wild ginger—*Asarum leucosepalum* and *Asarum hatsushimaei*—the latter endemic to Tokunoshima. Another rare and endangered plant is a species of *Arisaema*, which are often called cobra lilies because of the distinctive appearance of their hooded flowers.

Access and Night Tours

The entrances to the road on both sides are fenced (but not padlocked) to protect the plants and wildlife, and visitors must stay on the road to protect the forest's fragile environment. Those who would like to catch a glimpse of the nocturnal animal life, including the Amami black rabbit, should enquire with the local tourist office about night tours, which can be easily arranged depending on weather conditions.

Note to drivers and bikers: Please drive or bike at speeds under 15 kilometers an hour when using the Boma Forest Road, to avoid damaging the environment.

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