

## Subtropical Flora

Yakushima's vast diversity of flora ranges from subarctic vegetation on the mountaintops to subtropical vegetation along the coastline. The island is the northernmost limit in Japan for many subtropical species, including the Chinese banyan (*Ficus microcarpa*).

### *Banyan Trees*

Yakushima is best known for its Japanese cedar, the famed *yakusugi*. However, the Chinese banyan, found along the coast in the north (Isso, Shitoko, Miyanoura), east (Anbo, Sarukawa), and south (Mugio, Koshima, Yudomari, Nakama), merits equal attention for its immensity, countless aerial roots, and intricately intertwined trunks.

### Shitoko Gajumaru Banyan Park

At Shitoko Gajumaru Banyan Park near Shitoko, a small coastal village in the north of Yakushima, there is a giant banyan believed to be more than 500 years old. Banyans are sacred in Yakushima and since ancient times have been believed to be the abode of spirits. The 8,695-square-meter park, which abounds with subtropical species such as evergreen *Moraceae* plants and *Litsea japonica* laurels, has paved walking paths for an easily accessible visit. Entry is ¥200 for adults and ¥100 for students.

Getting there: By car, about 35 minutes from Anbo Port, 11 minutes from Miyanoura Port, or 25 minutes from Yakushima Airport

### Sarukawa Gajumaru Banyan Forest

In contrast to the Shitoko Gajumaru Banyan Park, the 3,990-square-meter Sarukawa Gajumaru Banyan Forest, thick with vegetation and tangled vines, is a little-known preserve of untamed nature. Proper hiking shoes and long trousers are recommended for walking through this jungle-like area.

Getting there: From Anbo, drive down the Prefectural Route No. 77 about 6 kilometers southward, and turn right and drive another 300 meters into the mountains.

### *Mangrove Trees*

Mangroves flourish at the mouth of the Kurio River on the southwestern coast of Yakushima. The local species (*Kandelia obovata*) is smaller than the typical mangrove due to the relatively cool climate there, and the grove at Kurio is the only place where the species grows naturally on the island. Seeds germinate and continue to grow while still suspended from the tree branches. The area is submerged at high tide. The grove is

designated a cultural property of Yakushima.

Getting there: By car, about 44 minutes from Anbo Port, 69 minutes from Miyanoura Port, or 56 minutes from Yakushima Airport

### *Flowers and Fruits*

Numerous varieties of hibiscus grow on Yakushima, thriving in the warm climate and abundant rainfall. Red-flowered Chinese hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) grows along the roadsides, while yellow-flowered Hamabo hibiscus (*Hibiscus hamabo*) flourishes near the mangrove forest in Kurio. Pale pink Makinoi hibiscus (*Hibiscus makinoi*) flowers bloom in autumn. Bougainvillea, plumeria, and flowering shrubs such as cockspur coral tree (*Erythrina crista-galli*) and shrub coral tree (*Erythrina x bidwillii*) also bloom throughout the year. Subtropical flowers, as well as fruit such as mangoes, guavas, and star fruit, can be viewed at the Botanical Research Park in Mugio on the southeast side of the island. Entry is ¥500 for adults. The Yakushima Fruit Garden in Nakama, on the southwest side of the island, offers a garden tour and has a shop selling fruit jams and juices. Entry is ¥500 for adults.