

## **The Island of Kuchinoerabujima**

Kuchinoerabujima is an island of active volcanoes, formed in part from the magma emitted by their eruptions.

### *Access*

Kuchinoerabujima has no airport and is reachable only by ferry operated by Ferry Taiyo, which takes about one hour and 40 minutes from Yakushima's Miyanoura Port. The ferry runs once a day, in the morning on even-numbered days and in the afternoon on odd-numbered days, stopping in Kuchinoerabujima for only 30 to 40 minutes. For this reason, a round trip to the island from Yakushima requires at least two days. Cars and bicycles can be taken on the ferry at additional cost; transportation on Kuchinoerabujima is otherwise limited.

### *Area and Population*

Kuchinoerabujima is about 38 square kilometers in area and 50 kilometers in circumference. As of November 2020, the population was 103, and the number of households was 64. During the early twentieth century, at the height of the island's sulfur mining boom, the population peaked at over 1,000, but has since diminished with the departure of the workforce and a declining birthrate.

### *Lifestyle*

Islanders typically live simply and catch their own fish. There are two stores on the island: a liquor store and the JA Co-op store. The Co-op is open Monday to Friday, and the stock of items depends on the day. If the ferry service is suspended due to inclement weather, food shipments may not arrive for 7 to 10 days. Many households have multiple refrigerators and large freezers for stockpiling food.

There is no hospital or permanently stationed physician on the island. Local residents bathe at Nemachi hot spring, one of four hot springs on the island known for their therapeutic properties.

### *Fauna and Flora*

Volcanic ash forms soil rich with minerals that produce abundant harvests. Fertile fishing grounds surround the island, with the mixing of cold and warm ocean currents creating optimal ecosystems for marine life. Nearly 700 species of fish and shellfish

have been confirmed, and new species continue to be discovered in the area. Japanese spiny lobster (*Panulirus japonicus*) is a local specialty. The large Erabu fruit bat (*P. d. dasymallus*) is endemic to the region, and the island is its northernmost habitat in the world, for which reason it was designated a Natural Monument of Japan in 1975. The bats, which have dark brown bodies (males have a yellow and females have a white band around their necks), are about 25 centimeters long, and fly relying on vision rather than sound. The eruption by Mt. Shindake in 2015 has reduced the number of trees that the bats feed on, and consequently, the bats were designated as National Endangered Species in 2019. Pink Dwarf Indica azaleas (*Rhododendron eriocarpum*) typically cover the mountain peaks from June to July; however, they have yet to bloom since the 2015 eruption wiped out the plants.

Kuchinoerabujima was designated part of Yakushima National Park in March 2012 and of Yakushima-Kuchinoerabu UNESCO Eco Park in 2016.