

Garō Falls

At Garō Falls, water cascades from a height of 12 meters into an emerald pool surrounded by lush woodlands at the entrance to Garō Gorge. Although it is only a few dozen meters from Prefectural Route 317, this is one of the area's most scenic waterfalls.

The forest surrounding Garō Falls is filled with painted maples, Japanese cedars, and Japanese horse chestnuts, with wisteria vines twining around some of the trees. The clear pool at the base of the falls is 3 to 4 meters deep, and in summer the falls are a good place to escape the heat. In autumn, chestnuts, maples, and ginkgos change to brilliant yellow and orange, and their leaves carpet the walkway along the water's edge. In winter, the falls freeze to create columns of snow and ice, which are lit up at night.

For centuries, visitors have come to admire the falls. Sugae Masumi (1754–1829), a traveler and natural historian from the Nagoya area, spent decades traveling around Akita and recording what he saw. In 1802 he composed a poem about Garō Falls that is inscribed on a stone nearby:

*furu yuki ka
hana ka aranu ka
yamakaze ni
sasowaretechiru
taki no shira awa*

Is it falling snow?
Pale blossoms, perhaps . . . or not?
In the mountain wind,
Drawn, carried, scattered about—
The waterfall's white froth.

Adjacent to the falls is Taki no Sawa Shrine. It was founded in 1780 and dedicated to the fearsome, flame-enshrouded deity known as Fudō Myō-ō, one of the Five Wisdom Kings in Buddhism. Historically, mountain ascetics prayed to images of Fudō, so he is commonly enshrined near waterfalls where their ascetic practices were conducted.

The parking area for Garō Falls is about a 10-minute drive from the town of Fujisato. From there, visitors can walk directly to the falls and Taki no Sawa Shrine, or head into Garō Gorge along a forest road that leads to Mt. Takayama (388 m). This scenic route travels through the gorge alongside the tumbling mountain stream that feeds Garō Falls. About 30 minutes on foot from the parking area, the road passes a second waterfall: the two-tier Shiraito Nidan Falls.

Past Shiraito Nidan, the Mt. Takayama road continues deeper into the gorge for 1 more kilometer before reaching another small parking area. This is the trailhead for hiking to Mt. Takayama's summit, which takes about 1 hour. From the summit, hikers can continue on a connecting trail and come out near the Shirakami-Sanchi World Heritage Conservation Center.

This highly accessible route—beginning at the Garō Falls parking area and ending at the Conservation Center—is a great way to explore the natural beauty surrounding Fujisato in less than half a day. Visitors who choose to drive as far as the Mt. Takayama trailhead should be aware that the road is unpaved and occasionally rocky.