

Amanohashidate

Background

The Amanohashidate sandbar has been celebrated for its remarkable beauty and revered as a sacred spot for centuries. White sand and green pines are juxtaposed against a blue sea, a landscape historically admired in Japan. Amanohashidate, along with Miyajima in Hiroshima Prefecture and Matsushima in Miyagi Prefecture, was named one of Japan's Three Scenic Views (*Nihon sankei*) by neo-Confucian philosopher and government administrator Hayashi Gaho, also known as Hayashi Shunsai (1618–1680). Owing to this acclaim, Amanohashidate has been a popular tourist destination since the Edo period (1603–1867); however, the area had been frequented by aristocrats and pilgrims since at least the eighth century. It is immortalized in poetry, paintings, fiction, plays, and other forms of art.

Legend

Various myths surround the sandbar, including one involving the primordial Shinto deities Izanami no Mikoto and Izanagi no Mikoto. According to the story, Amanohashidate, which means “bridge to heaven,” was used as a ladder between heaven and earth by Izanagi to visit his lover Izanami. One day while they were napping the ladder fell to earth, resulting in the landform we see today. Historically considered sacred ground, visitors would traditionally pay homage to the region's temples and shrines, specifically: Chionji Temple, Amanohashidate Jinja Shrine, Nariaiji Temple, and Motoise Kono Jinja Shrine.

Geography

The 3.6-kilometer sandbar formed naturally from the sediment of nearby rivers. It stretches south across Miyazu Bay, almost entirely enclosing the Aso Sea. Long ago, travelers rode ferries from Chionji to Amanohashidate Jinja, crossing a channel approximately 100 meters wide. However, a landslide in the Edo period significantly shortened this distance and two bridges now allow visitors to reach the sandbar on foot.

Amanohashidate is subject to erosion by the water, and the sandbar began thinning after the banks of nearby rivers were paved, subsequently stopping the flow of sediment into the bay. Preservation efforts to fortify the eastern side with sand have resulted in jagged sand beaches. The coastline is expected to smooth out over the next few decades.

Observation Points

Two parks overlook Amanohashidate. Kasamatsu Park, located on the northern end near Nariaiji and Motoise Kono Jinja, is the more historic observation point. It has two lookout areas, one of which dates back to the Meiji era (1868–1912), and is accessible via chairlift or cable car. Amanohashidate View Land is located on the southern end, near the train station and Chionji, and is accessible via chairlift or monorail. It has a number of attractions, including a Ferris wheel, playground, and go-karts.

The traditional way to observe Amanohashidate is to stand facing away and gaze back through one's legs. This pose is called *matanozoki* and is said to make the green sandbar appear more like a bridge to heaven floating in reflections of the sky. Both parks are furnished with elevated viewing platforms for this purpose. *Chie no wa* (wisdom rings affiliated with Chionji Temple) are also located in both parks. Successfully throwing a disc through the auspicious ring is said to improve your intelligence.

Activities

Sightseeing cruises, sea-kayak rentals, and bicycle rentals are all offered on-site. Popular swimming beaches are located at the southern end. Those planning to walk the length of the sandbar should estimate about 50 minutes in one direction.