

Mt. Yamainu

The moss-covered landscape of Mt. Yamainu (997.2 m) is famous in Tokushima, but to the rest of the world, it is still a hidden gem waiting to be explored. According to local legend, the name was given because rocks on the summit resembled a *yamainu* (mountain dog) with its mouth open. A great portion of the mountain collapsed in 1701 due to heavy rain, resulting in its current shape comprised of numerous large boulders around 10 meters high.

Mt. Yamainu is regarded as a sacred mountain in Shugendo, a syncretic religion of mountain asceticism, because of the many large and unusually shaped boulders. It is also revered for its connection to Kukai (774-835), the founder of Shingon Buddhism, and is known as a mountain location best used to pray for rain.

Hiking Trail

To the summit: 1,740 meters, 75 minutes

To Tokoji Temple: 1,420 meters, 60 minutes

To mossy outcropping: 950 meters, 40 minutes

The hiking trailhead is northeast of the Kashiwara rice terraces. It is a good idea to go with a guide or pick up a map from a box at the trailhead (also downloadable from the URL below) because all signage is in Japanese. The trail splits in two not far from the starting point, and most hikers should follow the left-hand fork to catch the most interesting sights.

Along the way is a side trail to the left that leads to a clearing used for yoga classes. Hikers who are not there for yoga should continue along the main path. Eventually, the path will split again, and the left-hand fork is a direct route to Tokoji Temple while the right-hand fork leads directly to the mossy outcropping mid-way along the trail. However, the outcropping can be reached from either route.

The hike passes through a forest with 88 small Buddhist statues along the trail that comprise a miniature version of the famous Shikoku 88 Temple Pilgrimage. About 40 minutes into the forest the rocks become completely covered with thick moss. Although the moss can be viewed year-round, it is most green, moist, and fluffy from the rainy season in June and into the early summer.

An alternative to climbing to the peak is to take the east fork past the mossy outcropping to an observatory rock and Konpira Shrine. The trail leads through ever larger boulders, many of which tower above the trees. The contrast between the dark boulders and the forest greenery, together with the small statues, combine into a serene, mystical landscape.

The view from atop the observatory rock is a panorama overlooking the forest and surrounding mountains. From there, the trail up to the summit is steep, so many hikers choose to return rather than continue. The trail upward eventually passes by Tokoji Temple, which is surrounded by large Japanese cedar trees. The view there looks out over the forest and all the way to the Pacific Ocean. This spot is particularly recommended in autumn when the red and yellow foliage of maple trees mixes with the green of cedars.

About 20 meters from the temple building are three stone statues. The right statue is of Zenki and the left statue is of Goki, a pair of ogres that are said to have accompanied En no Gyoja (634-701), the founder of Shugendo, represented by the center statue. The trail to the west leads the rest of the way to the peak and to Kumosa Jinja, a shrine dedicated to the deity of rain.