

Bandai-Azuma Skyline

Mountains, lakes, wetlands, and volcanic craters are part of the striking scenery along the 29-kilometer Bandai-Azuma Skyline, the sightseeing road that winds through the Azuma mountain range in Bandai-Asahi National Park. The road connects Takayu Onsen and Tsuchiyu Pass, two secluded areas with nearby hot springs in northern Fukushima Prefecture. Viewpoints along the route offer panoramas of the diverse landscape. These are known as the “Eight Views of Azuma.”

The Bandai-Azuma Skyline is open from early April to mid-November, and is one hour by car from the city of Fukushima.

The Eight Views of Azuma

The Eight Views capture key scenic features along the Skyline. The names of the viewpoints were assigned by famous novelist and poet Inoue Yasushi (1907–1991).

Shirakaba no Mine

This lookout is the first of the “Eight Views of Azuma” that visitors encounter along the Skyline when departing from Takayu Onsen. Erman’s birches and Japanese white pines are predominant along this section of the Skyline, located at an elevation of 1,140 meters.

Tsubakuro Valley

The valley here takes its name from the swallows (*tsubakuro*) that make their nests in the rocky walls of the ravine. The viewing platform at 1,200 meters commands a panorama of the valley, the Fudosawa Bridge that spans it, and the urbanized areas of the Fukushima Basin in the distance. In autumn, the mixed vegetation of the ravine creates a rich tapestry of color.

Tengu no Niwa

Writer Inoue Yasushi imagined the boulder-strewn tract directly below this viewpoint at 1,350 meters to be the playground of *tengu*, winged goblins of Japanese folklore known for their red faces and long noses. The vista opens out on the city of Fukushima and the Abukama mountain range in the distance.

Jododaira

In the past, mountain ascetics came to the Azuma mountain range to practice various forms of spiritual discipline. Several ancient pilgrimage routes led to this beautiful subalpine plateau (Jododaira) brimming with lush vegetation and wildflowers. It was believed to resemble Jodo, the Buddhist Pure Land, thought to be a paradise of “ultimate bliss.”

The viewpoint here at 1,600 meters is located at the base of Mt. Azuma-Kofuji and marks the midway point of the Bandai-Azuma Skyline. From here, visitors can see Mt. Issaikyo, the Jododaira Wetlands, and Mt. Higashi-Azuma on clear days. Across the road from the viewpoint is the Jododaira Visitor Center, which provides information on hiking routes and Jododaira’s plants, animals, and birds. Several walking and hiking paths begin from the visitor center, including wooden walkways through the Jododaira Wetlands.

Soryu no Tsuji

Seen from the viewpoint, Mt. Adatarara on the left and Mt. Bandai on the right resemble raised dragon heads facing one another (*soryu*). Lake Inawashiro lies between them, and part of the Aizu Basin stretches out in the distance. Soryu no Tsuji is located on a sharp bend in the road at an elevation of 1,546 meters, around 5 kilometers from Jododaira.

Umimitoge Pass

When the Bandai-Azuma Skyline was built in 1959, Umimitoge Pass or “lake view pass” offered views of several lakes. Vegetation now obscures the lakes, but visitors can see Mt. Bandai.

Tenpukyo

Tenpukyo (1,280 m) offers a panorama across a wide valley to the densely forested mountainside of Mt. Takayama. On a clear day, visitors can glimpse the white cascade of Makutaki Falls on the mountainside. Many drivers stop here for views of the fall foliage. *Tenpu* means “heavenly wind.”

Kunimidai

Kunimidai (1,250 m) affords unobstructed views of Mt. Bandai and the edge of the Aizu Basin. *Kuni* means “homeland,” and refers to the view merchants and pilgrims would have had in times past, looking down on their homeland either in sad farewell or joyous homecoming as they embarked on or returned from journeys through the mountains. Writer Inoue Yasushi described the view of the sunset from Kunimidai as akin to “the

finale of a beautiful symphony.”