

Mt. Issaikyo and Mt. Higashi-Azuma

Mt. Issaikyo

Steam and volcanic gases escape continuously from the Oana Crater on the eastern side of Mt. Issaikyo (1,949 m). The volcano formed approximately 300,000 years ago and is still highly active, but generally safe to climb. It is monitored closely, and trails are closed to the public during periods of increased activity.

The route to the summit begins from the Jododaira Visitor Center and passes through the Jododaira Wetlands. The hike takes around 90 minutes one way. The path steepens from the waypoint at the Sugadaira Wetlands. Volcanic debris covers much of this section of the trail, and the footing can be difficult. From the summit, hikers have views of Goshikinuma, a volcanic crater lake popular for its mesmerizing cobalt blue color. Beyond Goshikinuma is the Nishi-Azuma mountain range. The round trip from the visitor center to Goshikinuma via the summit of Mt. Issaikyo takes about four hours. Returning via Kamanuma Pond and the Ubagahara Wetlands adds another hour.

Some grasses and shrubs are able to grow on parts of the mountain despite the presences of volcanic gases. These include wavy hairgrass, Japanese knotweed, bog bilberry, and a Japanese subspecies of the crowberry.

Mt. Issaikyo is the most active volcano in the Tohoku region, and monitoring equipment is installed on the mountain to detect the slightest tremors. While hiking, it is important to keep safety in mind: avoid inhaling the volcanic gases that emanate from the crater, bring appropriate hiking gear, allow enough time for the hike, and pay attention to the weather forecast.

Mt. Higashi-Azuma

Mt. Higashi-Azuma (1,975 m) is located southwest of Jododaira. The hiking trail to the summit starts from the Jododaira Visitor Center and passes Kamanuma Pond and the Ubagahara Wetlands, where subalpine plants and flowers grow throughout the spring, summer, and fall months.

From Ubagahara, the trail leads mostly through a forest of Maries' fir (*Abies mariesii*). The peak offers hikers panoramic views of the Azuma mountain range and the

Urabandai landscape, including Mt. Bandai and Lake Inawashiro. Weather permitting, Mt. Iide and Mt. Gassan can be seen in the distance.

Hikers can return to the visitor center back along the same trail, or take the route heading south down to the Keibadaira Wetlands. This trail is steep and often muddy, and is only recommended for experienced hikers. The round trip via Ubagahara takes around 3 hours, and via Keibadaira, around 4 to 5 hours.