

## Into the Field

The local communities within Myoko-Togakushi renzan National Park offer dozens of cultural and historical activities to complement its natural wonders. In addition to the highlights given here, information on the full range of locations for hiking, learning, and exploring can be found at the Visitor Center brochure section or information desk.

### Hikes and Nature Walks

- Itoigawa UNESCO Global Geopark (Itoigawa City, Niigata)  
In 2009, Itoigawa Geopark became Japan's first UNESCO Global Geopark. The geopark lies on the Itoigawa-Shizuoka Tectonic Line, a geological fault line that separates the continental plates of Eurasia and North America. Historically, Itoigawa was famous for its gem-quality jade, and visitors can learn about jade formation as well as Japan's complex geology at the Fossa Magna Museum.
- Kama-ike Pond (Otari Village, Nagano)  
Kama-ike Pond lies south of Mt. Amakazari, surrounded by a highland forest with 300-year-old beech trees. The secluded location and mirror-like waters make this a favorite destination for forest therapy hikes. A 2-kilometer path encircles the pond, offering a level walking surface suitable for visitors of all ages.
- Naena-taki Falls (Myoko City, Niigata)  
Once called "Earthquake Falls" (*naidaki*) for its thunderous roar, Naena-taki Falls is a dramatic illustration of the volume of water that travels down from the high peaks. The tremendous flow has carved its own spout in the mountain bedrock, and it tumbles 55 meters over a sheer cliffside to the boulder-strewn riverbed below. A series of stairs and bridges leads to an observation point near the falls.
- Yumemidaira Hiking Trail (Myoko City, Niigata)  
The verdant Sasagamine Highland offers numerous hiking trails. The Yumemidaira Hiking Trail is a 5-kilometer-long loop trail that begins at the Sasagamine Dam. After several steep flights of steps to reach the trailhead, the trail is gentle. It travels through oak and beech woodlands and passes the Yumemidaira marshland, where in spring thousands of skunk cabbages bloom against the towering backdrop of Mt. Myoko's volcanic rim.
- The Avenue of Cedars at Togakushi Jinja Okusha Shrine (Nagano City, Nagano)  
More than 200 immense Japanese cedar trees line the approach to the inner shrine (*okusha*) of Togakushi Jinja Shrine. These towering giants were planted around the start of the Edo period (1603–1867) as part of a rebuilding effort after decades of warfare. In 1643, logging was prohibited in the area, giving rise to the

centuries-old forest of oak, beech, horse chestnut, fir, and yew that surrounds the path. The cedars begin at Zuijinmon Gate, a crimson, thatch-roofed gateway about halfway to the shrine.

### Lakes

- Lake Nojiri (Shinano Town, Nagano)

Lake Nojiri is a resort area focused on water recreation. Visitors can traverse the lake in rented canoes and kayaks, or tour the lake on sightseeing boats. Passenger boats ferry people to the shrine on tiny Benten-jima Island (also called Biwa-jima Island). In summer, large charter boats take passengers out to fish, and in winter visitors can fish for Japanese pond smelt from warm, covered boats (*yakatabune*). During the warmer months, there is open-air dining at a variety of restaurants and cafes on Lake Nojiri's shores.

- Lake Reisenji (Iizuna Town, Nagano)

Lake Reisenji, known for its winter ice fishing, is also popular during the summer months. Boat rental options include swan-shaped paddleboats. There is a children's playground, as well as four Nordic walking routes that range from 2.2 to 12.5 kilometers long. The lake is bordered by broad, grassy expanses with excellent views of the mountains.

### Museums

- Nojiriko Naumann Elephant Museum (Shinano Town, Nagano)

Just a short walk from the lakeshore, the Nojiriko Naumann Elephant Museum is a natural history museum with exhibits on the prehistoric life that once flourished in the area of Lake Nojiri. The museum displays the fossilized tooth of a Naumann elephant discovered in 1948 in the lakebed, as well as many other fossils unearthed in subsequent excavations. The exhibits also include life-sized reconstructions of many prehistoric animals, as well as artifacts from early human civilizations from roughly the same period.

- Togakushi Museum of Natural History (Nagano City, Nagano)

Occupying a former elementary school building, this unusual museum houses an extensive collection of objects relating to the natural history of the Nagano region. The third floor has formal, in-depth exhibits on the geological and paleontological development of Japan and the Myoko-Togakushi region. Other parts of the museum are less formal but just as engaging—such as the “bone room,” where shelves hold hundreds of animal skulls and a giraffe skeleton looms over the

entryway. Other rooms contain live representatives of the local fish and amphibian populations. The museum hallways are lined with antique science equipment and preserved specimens that were used in the school's science classes. There is even a corner where visitors can wear costumes made from animal furs.

- **Togakushi Ninja Museum (Nagano City, Nagano)**

This complex houses two museums: the Togakushi Ninja Museum and the Togakushi Folk Museum. The Togakushi Folk Museum's exhibits on historical material culture include densely packed display cases of well-preserved farming tools, handicrafts, and everyday clothing that together convey a vivid picture of life in a traditional mountain village. The Togakushi Ninja Museum takes an equally historical approach to Togakushi's ninja heritage, displaying authentic ninja weaponry, clothing, and black-and-white photographs of modern ninja demonstrating various techniques and training methods. Beside the Ninja Museum is the Ninja Trick Mansion, a maze-like structure with trick doors and a variety of hidden features and illusions designed to prevent an easy exit.

### **Imori-ike Pond**

Just outside the Visitor Center is Imori-ike Pond, one of Myoko's most popular scenic areas. Behind the pond rises the towering form of Mt. Myoko, reflected in the pond on clear days. Each spring the pond is surrounded by the blooms of bogbean and some 100,000 Asian skunk cabbages.

*Funa* (crucian carp) and koi (Amur carp) live in Imori-ike Pond, together with—according to rumor—an elusive golden koi. Unfortunately, the pond's health is under threat from invasive white waterlilies, which spread quickly and drive out the native pygmy waterlilies.

A 500-meter, wheelchair-accessible path encircles the pond, and a leisurely circuit takes about 15 minutes. Visitors may spot dragonflies like the Siberian hawk and a species of Eurasian bluet called *ezoitotonbo* along the pond's shores.