

Dining on Mt. Norikura

Two restaurants are located at the Tatamidaira parking area on Mt. Norikura—one in the Norikura Bus Terminal building, and the other on the second floor of Norikura Ginreisō. Both serve light meals such as ramen and udon noodles, as well as heartier set lunches (*teishoku*) and local specialties. Because Mt. Norikura straddles the border between Gifu and Nagano Prefectures, its dining facilities offer dishes from both regional cuisines.

The Hida region of Gifu is famed for its high-quality beef, known as *Hida gyū*. On Mt. Norikura it is prepared in croquettes, on noodles, as grilled beef (*yakiniku*), and in savory buns (*nikuman*). *Hida gyū* also features in the signature local delicacy *hōba misoyaki*. In this rustic dish, beef and locally grown vegetables are topped with sweetened miso sauce and grilled atop a magnolia leaf (*hōba*), which imparts a delicate woody aroma to the ingredients.

Sukuna nabe, another Norikura offering, is a miso-based hotpot dish that includes more than 10 slowly simmered ingredients, including pork, leeks, and daikon radishes. It is traditionally cooked in the town of Nyūkawa (northern Takayama, in Gifu Prefecture) to celebrate the fall harvest. The dish is named for a local divine warrior with two faces, four hands, and four legs described in the *Nihon Shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*, 720 CE).

Nagano cuisine is best known for its buckwheat noodle (*soba*) dishes, most notably those containing wild mountain vegetables (*sansai*). Asian royal ferns (*zenmai*), slender bamboo shoots (*hosotake*), Japanese spikenard (*udo*), butterbur (*fuki*), and *nameko* mushrooms are common additions.

As many hikers know, cooking at high altitude brings challenges. The dining facilities at Tatamidaira are at an elevation of 2,702 meters, and the lower air pressure means water boils at roughly 91 degrees Celsius. This can make cooking even plain rice more difficult, extending its cooking time and lowering the cooking temperature, which can alter the rice's texture. Furthermore, because of the long distance to town and the restrictions on vehicle traffic to the mountaintop, bringing in ingredients and carrying down waste has added complications. Despite it all, the chefs on Mt. Norikura succeed in satisfying a regular stream of hungry visitors.