

Stargazing on Mt. Norikura

In 1949, cosmic ray researchers at Osaka City University searched Japan's mountains for the perfect location to conduct experiments monitoring the farthest reaches of space. They ultimately chose Mt. Norikura's alpine plateau, Tatamidaira, for its high altitude and exceptionally clear skies. In 1953, the Cosmic Ray Observatory of the University of Tokyo (now the Norikura Observatory) was built on the site. Since then, Mt. Norikura has been a favorite destination for professional and hobbyist astronomers seeking extraordinary views of the night sky.

When the weather is favorable, the conditions for stargazing on Mt. Norikura are perfect. Tatamidaira is in a basin surrounded by mountain ridges, so it is shielded from the nighttime lights of neighboring cities like Matsumoto and Takayama. Compared to similar high-altitude sites, access to the plateau is also excellent. Regular buses run from both Matsumoto and Takayama to the Norikura Bus Terminal (2,702 m).

The last buses depart Tatamidaira before dark, so hopeful stargazers should plan on an overnight stay at one of the mountain's lodgings: Norikura Haku'unsō, Norikura Ginreisō, or Kata no Koya Mountain Hut. The accommodations are affordable, comfortable, and convenient, and some have telescopes and star charts available for visitor use.

Visibility and photography are best when the moon is new.