

Cycling on the Norikura Echo Line and Norikura Skyline

Mt. Norikura has long attracted outdoor enthusiasts with its lush woodlands, excellent vistas, and the challenge of the ascent. Climbing, hiking, and skiing each have a history on the mountain, and now Norikura is drawing a new kind of athlete: recreational cyclists.

The mountain summit is accessible by two highways—the 20.5-kilometer Norikura Echo Line on the Nagano side and the 14.4-kilometer Norikura Skyline on the Gifu side. Both roads are closed to private motor vehicles, but they have become magnets for cyclists of all ages and skill levels, from weekend hobbyists to seasoned professional racers.

Mt. Norikura rose to fame in Japan's cycling community in 1986 with the first Norikura Hill Climb held on the Echo Line. The race's twisting curves and spectacular scenery are reminiscent of the Tour de France's Alps and Pyrenees courses. Held the last weekend of August, the annual race now attracts more than 4,000 participants—from elite racers who complete the course in less than an hour to amateur cyclists who simply wish to conquer the peak. Many return year after year to improve their own best times.

In 2004 the Norikura Skyline Cycle Hill Climb in Gifu was added to the regional cycling calendar. This 18.4-kilometer-long course climbs 1,342 meters and has an average gradient of 7.2 percent. It, too, attracts cyclists of all ages and abilities, some of whom even don costumes to participate. Recently the race has introduced a category for electric bikes, meaning that even less athletic participants can race to the summit—with a little electro-mechanical assistance.

Cycling in the Norikura area is not limited to the road. A growing network of mountain bike trails enables off-road exploration as well. Facilities in Norikura Kōgen offer mountain bike and electric bike rentals, lessons, and guided tours of the highlands.