

## **Trekking in Shizukuishi**

The northwest side of Shizukuishi is part of Towada-Hachimantai National Park, and the town encompasses several mountains connected by various trails. Visitors can explore a variety of places from this convenient location, including Mt. Iwate, Mt. Eboshidake, and the regions of Mt. Akita-Komagatake and Mt. Mitsuishi. Everyone from experienced mountaineers to those who prefer leisurely walks will find plentiful opportunities to appreciate the beauty of the region on foot. This section introduces some of the main trekking courses in Shizukuishi, followed by some tips for making the most of a stay in the region.

A visit to the Amihari Visitor Center is highly recommended when planning outdoor adventures in Shizukuishi. The center, located within Towada-Hachimantai National Park, offers comprehensive information on recreational activities as well as the nature and history of Mt. Iwate and the other mountains within the national park area. It was renovated in 2020 and now makes use of interactive technology such as augmented reality to present information in several languages, including topographical maps that show hiking routes.

### **Mt. Iwate**

The southwestern foothills of Mt. Iwate, the highest mountain peak in Iwate Prefecture at 2,038 meters, are in Shizukuishi. The characters that make up the name Iwate mean “rock hand.” According to a well-known legend, a wicked demon was tormenting the local people, so the gods pinned him to the rocky mountain as punishment. Begging to be released, the demon promised never to bother the people again, and marked his oath with a handprint on one of the rocks. Over the centuries, people of the region came to view the mountain as a sacred place, and a tradition of mountain worship developed there. The Amihari Visitor Center offers information on the history of Mt. Iwate and its impact on the religion and culture of the region.

Two major routes, the Omisaka Trail and the Amihari Trail, go up Mt. Iwate from Shizukuishi. Both are challenging. The Amihari Trail starts from the Amihari Onsen Ski Resort. On certain days from early July to mid-October, hikers can travel up 1,350 meters in the ski lift to the start of the trailhead. The ski lift is also used by people who come to see the colorful foliage in autumn.

### **Mt. Mitsuishi**

Mt. Mitsuishi offers two attractive courses: the Takinoue Trail, a somewhat challenging hike along a gorge, and the Okusando Trail, which is shorter and more popular. Mt. Mitsuishi is widely considered to be the first place on Japan’s main island of Honshu where visitors can see the fall foliage each autumn. In winter, it is popular with hikers who come to see “snow monsters”—local trees coated in frost and snow.

### **Mt. Akita-Komagatake**

The Kunimi Onsen Trail that leads up Mt. Akita-Komagatake is of medium difficulty. It is well known for the many alpine flowers and other plants that grow there in the summer months.

### **Mt. Eboshidake**

Eboshidake offers the challenging Takinoue Onsen Trail that passes through Senshogahara, which means “field of 1,000 marshes.” As suggested by the name, Senshogahara contains more than 900 pools, as well as various alpine flowers. It even inspired a scene in an anime movie by Studio Ghibli.

### **Amihari Forest**

This lovely forest, consisting mostly of Japanese beech and oak trees, spreads over the southern foot of Mt. Iwate. It can be explored via the Amihari Forest Nature Trail, which is accessible in any season and suitable for all levels of fitness. It takes about an hour to complete the circular trail, making it an ideal introduction to the beauty of the area for those with limited time. The forest is well worth a visit in any season, but particularly when the leaves change color in autumn. The Amihari Nature Forest Trail is also recommended for snowshoe hikes in winter. Traditional oval-shaped *wakanjiki* shoes and modern snowshoes are available for rent at the Amihari Visitor Center. It is possible to join a scheduled tour or explore on one’s own, and snowshoes offer access to areas of the forest that cannot be reached in the warmer months.

### **Tips for Trekkers**

Please help to protect the natural environment for the enjoyment of current and future users. Take all trash home and respect the plants and wildlife you encounter—do not pick flowers or feed the birds and animals. This area is the natural habitat of the Asiatic black bear, so trekkers are advised to make some noise to warn bears of their approach. Many hikers also attach a bell to their backpack or trekking poles. When planning treks, hikers should consider the conditions of the route and their level of fitness, and dress appropriately for the weather. In warmer months it is essential to carry plenty of water to forestall dehydration and heatstroke. Seasoned trekkers typically wear long sleeves and trousers even in the summer for protection against insects. When out on the trails, it is customary to greet people coming from the other direction with a friendly “Konnichi wa!” (Hello!). Finally, before going trekking, it is always wise to make sure someone is aware of where you are headed, in case of mishap.