

The Hinai River: A Landscape of Mangroves and Waterfalls

This viewpoint overlooks the mangrove forests and tidal flats of Funaura Bay, and Pinaisara Falls beyond. With a 55-meter drop, Pinaisara is the highest waterfall in Okinawa Prefecture. Inspired by its thin white stream, the name means “hanging beard.” The top of the falls offers sweeping views over the mangroves out to Hatopanari and Hatoma Islands.

Mangroves provide a host of benefits. They store much more carbon in the soil than other forests, protect coastlines from erosion by dissipating high waves with their trunks and unique prop and knee roots, keep seawater away from inland waterways and crops, and trap and filter fresh water and sediment heading to the sea.

Mangrove forests are also the basis of an integrated ecosystem. Creatures such as whelks, mud clams, and crabs feed on the fallen leaves and other organic detritus, converting them into nutrients for the phytoplankton that are eaten by the fish who shelter in the mangroves' elaborate root systems. Mangrove forests also attract birds such as the sandpiper, whose long narrow bill is designed to probe the mud for food, and egrets. One curious creature to watch for is the mudskipper, a burrow-dwelling amphibious fish that hops across the mud and is known in the local dialect as *ton ton mii*.

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