

## **Bandai-Asahi National Park**

Millions of years of volcanic activity and tectonic uplifts have produced the mountain ranges, lakes, and wetlands that comprise Bandai-Asahi National Park. The park covers the prefectures of Fukushima, Niigata, and Yamagata and includes numerous sites of geological, botanical, and spiritual significance. These include lakes and ponds near Mt. Bandai, the coniferous forest of Mt. Nishiazuma, and the Dewa Sanzan sacred mountains.

### *Highlights of the park*

Successive eruptions of Mt. Bandai (1,816 m) created the distinct topography of the Bandai-Azuma and Inawashiro region in Fukushima Prefecture. On the northern slopes of Mt. Bandai, lakes and wetlands formed by volcanic activity make up Urabandai. On the south side of Mt. Bandai is Lake Inawashiro, Japan's fourth largest lake. The lake is the result of an eruption around 50,000 years ago.

In Yamagata Prefecture, the three peaks of Gassan (1,984 m), Haguro (414 m), and Yudono (1,500 m)—collectively known as Dewa Sanzan—are sacred sites and have been places of pilgrimage for mountain ascetics for over 1,400 years. Native subalpine plants, meadows of colorful wildflowers, and ponds along the ridgeline of the Asahi mountains, located at the border of Yamagata and Niigata, contrast with lush forests in the foothills.

The Iide mountain range has forests of native beech, Erman's birch, and Japanese pine. These forests are habitats for large mammals like the Japanese black bear and serow. Mt. Iide (2,105 m) is also a sacred site for mountain worship.

### *Mt. Bandai*

Mt. Bandai is an active stratovolcano. The mountain as seen from the Urabandai area is notable for its partially collapsed peak which is the result of a major eruption in 1888. The same eruption triggered rock avalanches that completely buried five villages in Urabandai and dammed up valleys. This led to the formation of numerous bodies of water including the Goshikinuma Ponds. These polychromatic ponds are colored by a

combination of volcanic sediment, minerals, and iron oxide that have leached into the lake beds over the years. Lake Hibara formed when a valley was blocked up by debris and filled with water. The remains of Hibara Village lie at the bottom of the lake.

### *Bandaisan Geopark*

Bandaisan Geopark encompasses sites within Bandai-Asahi National Park and around Lake Inawashiro. The sites are recognized for their geological and topographical significance and encourage visitors to consider both the destructive and creative forces of volcanic activity.