

Terrace Theater: Mountain Worship and Volcanic Scenery

The mountains of Bandai-Asahi National Park have long been important to practitioners of the mountain asceticism called Shugendo. The faith emerged in the Nara period (710–794) and blends elements and practices of Shinto mountain worship, Buddhism, and local folk beliefs.

There are many sites of worship across the mountain ranges that comprise the national park: the Three Sacred Mountains of Dewa in Yamagata Prefecture; the Iide mountain range, which spans Yamagata, Niigata, and Fukushima Prefectures; and the stratovolcanoes of Mt. Bandai, Mt. Azuma-Kofuji, and Mt. Adatara in Fukushima Prefecture. Routes like the Bandai-Azuma Skyline winding through the mountains afford striking views of the peaks that have drawn generations of Shugendo practitioners (*yamabushi*).

Shugendo emphasizes the interconnection between humans and nature. Important spiritual sites around the Three Sacred Mountains of Dewa include the Five-Storied Pagoda of Mt. Haguro and Yudonosan Shrine. At the annual Shoreisai Festival, held on Mt. Haguro on December 31, visitors can watch the ritual burning of a straw effigy of a demon.