

## **Secluded Lakeshore Hike: Lake Sainoko to Senjugahama Beach and Ryuzu Falls**

Lake Sainoko was once part of Lake Chuzenji, until collapsing mountain slopes and soil buildup separated the two. And while Chuzenji has become one of Japan's most famous tourist spots, Sainoko is not well known, so it is a perfect destination for hikers interested in quiet and solitude. It is a small lake, about 1.5 kilometers in circumference, fed by hidden springs and rainfall. The size of its beach varies with the water level. The forest features a low ground cover and a canopy of large Japanese larch, Mongolian oak, and Japanese elm trees, fed by the mountain streams that crisscross the area.

The hiking trail runs from Lake Sainoko to Senjugahama Beach at the western end of Lake Chuzenji, the site of one of Nikko's famous views: a panorama of the lake with multiple mountain slopes descending into its waters and the majestic Mt. Nantai in the distance. At the furthest point on the horizon is the spot where Lake Chuzenji empties into Kegon Falls, at an altitude of 1,269 meters above sea level.

Ryuzu (Dragon's Head) Falls, one of Okunikko's "Three Great Falls," is the trail destination. It is named for the outline of a dragon's head formed by two branches of the stream that are separated by a large rock face.

### **The Hiking Trail**

The first half of this trail is considered an easy route. The secluded nature of the course is enhanced by limited access to the trailhead—the road is open only to bicycles and scheduled low-emission buses. These buses run from the Akanuma Nature Information Center, with the trailhead for Lake Sainoko

beginning from the Sainoko-iriguchi bus stop (a little over 20 minutes from Akanuma). From there the trail crosses a suspension bridge before entering the long, level forest area to the lake, about a 25-minute walk. From Lake Sainoko the trail is similar to the first section, all the way to Senjugahama Beach (about 50 minutes). Those who are interested in a more leisurely walk can catch one of the low-emission buses back to Akanuma. For the more adventurous, the trail becomes moderately challenging as it continues along the Chuzenji lakeshore on an up-and-down route to Ryuzu Falls (about 1 hour and 40 minutes).

### **Trail Highlights**

Silence, solitude, and a comfortable walk are the highlights of this route—at least as far as the beach. Hikers are welcome to stop along the way and enjoy Lake Sainoko, as well as the leisure facilities (picnic tables and benches) available at Senjugahama Beach on Lake Chuzenji. Be aware that the area is extremely popular with lovers of flora in May (rhododendron), June (Japanese primrose, or *Primula japonica*), and October (fall colors). Boats ferry tourists from across the lake during the June primrose season. The trail from the beach to Ryuzu Falls offers a number of unobstructed views of Lake Chuzenji and the surrounding mountains, with other secluded beach spots along the way. One of the best views is from Akaiwa (Red Rock) before the trail leaves the shore for the last uphill section to the waterfall.

### **Trail Tips**

- Check the bus schedule. The bus service operates from the end of April to the end of November, and the schedule varies depending on the day of the week and the season.
- Watch out for bears. They are usually not aggressive and tend to avoid people, but it's advisable to make some noise as you walk to let them know you are near.

- The road to the trailhead is open to cyclists, and e-bikes are highly recommended. Please stay on the paved road and pull over to the side for passing buses.
- Please stay on the marked trails.
- Take all the photographs you want, but leave only footprints.