

Toilets in the Mountains

Preserving the unspoiled state of Yakushima's forests relies on visitors following the hiking guidelines—particularly regarding toilets. There are a number of ways visitors can reduce the impact of human waste on the island's protected areas. In addition to traditional flush toilets, there are composting toilets that process human waste into dry powder. There are also many booths that enable the use of “disposable toilets,” which hikers carry out of the forest and dispose of in designated bins at the nearest trailhead. Maintaining all of these toilet facilities requires considerable time and labor, and the Yakushima Mountain Environmental Management Council uses money donated by hikers to fund these crucial services.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, there were not enough toilet facilities to accommodate the flood of hikers during the island's busy seasons, resulting in crowding and overuse. Park rangers also found human waste near rivers and springs and inside tree stumps. Flush toilets were limited to major trailheads and tourist facilities, and only outhouses were available near the huts and summit areas. Waste from these outhouses was—and continues to be—removed and carried manually down the mountain in plastic tanks at a significant cost each year. It can take a porter carrying two tanks (a combined weight of nearly 40 kilograms) two days to complete the journey.

To reduce the physical and financial burden of removing human waste, a system using portable, disposable toilets was introduced in 2010. These compact packages come with two plastic bags: a dark green one for installing on the seats of disposable toilet booths, and a light-green zip-lock bag for secure storage. Used bags should be deposited in the rectangular gray bins located at trailheads. Hikers can purchase these disposable-toilet packs in advance at tourist information centers or select shops and hotels around the island. For each purchase made, 70 yen is donated to the environmental management fund.

An innovative composting toilet is located along the Arakawa Trail near the Kusugawa-wakare Junction, a little over 1.5 hours from the Arakawa Trail Entrance. This environmentally friendly mechanism does not use water, but instead combines waste with sawdust using a rotating drum and mixing blade. After using the toilet, hikers press a button to rotate the drum contents and aid the composting process. Through the action of heat-producing microorganisms, the waste becomes a dry powder much reduced in volume. Hikers are asked not to dispose of trash in the toilet, as it will cause the rotating mechanism to jam.

During the busy season (March to November), tent-style disposable-toilet booths are erected along

major trails. Maps showing the locations of all toilets are available for hikers to carry with them on the trail.