

The Mt. Togakushi and Nagano City Area

There are several trailheads along the Amatomi Trail, but many hikers begin at Nagano Station because it has bullet train access and hiking supply stores nearby. The trail then leads out of Nagano City, stopping at a few major religious sites on the way.

Zenkoji Temple, founded in 642, is one of the oldest centers of practicing faith in the Buddhist Pure Land. It has a 300-year-old wooden statue whose face has been worn smooth by the touch of devotees praying for relief from physical ailments.

From Zenkoji, the trail follows parts of the Togakushi Kodo Road, a pilgrimage route leading to Togakushi-jinja Shrine. This shrine complex encompasses a number of sites throughout Mt. Togakushi, a rugged mountain formed by tectonic plates pushing into each other and rising upward. Ascetics have long engaged in spiritual training among the steep cliffs and other hazards of this mountain.

As the Amatomi Trail passes through bustling Zenkoji and forested areas

of the Togakushi-jinja shrine complex, the decorations of the wooden temple and shrine buildings range from austere to elaborately carved. There are also stalls selling savory *oyaki* dumplings outside the temple and restaurants that serve noodles made from buckwheat grown in the Togakushi Highland.

Another site along the route is the Togakushi Ninja Museum, which exhibits the Togakure-ryu school of ninjutsu that was developed in these mountains. At the museum, hikers are encouraged to try out their ninja skills before moving on.