

Section 3

Kyushu & Okinawa Japan National Parks

Aso-Kuju National Park (Kumamoto pref., Oita pref.)

Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park (Miyazaki pref., Kagoshima pref.)

Keramashoto National Park (Okinawa pref.)

The diversity of Japan's National Parks is starkly vivid, from the deep powdery snows of Hokkaido, to the beaches of Okinawa.

Kyushu area Parks reflect the dynamic landscape of volcanic calderas and the surrounding shoreline, bays and coves.

Okinawa's Keramashoto is an archipelago of small islands abundant with tropical water marine life. A haven for divers and those who would like to just kick back and relax.

Aso-Kuju National Park (Kumamoto, Oita)



Geographical Characteristics

Mt. Aso has one of the world's largest calderas at about 25 km north-south and 18 km east-west consisting of the central cone composed of the five peaks of Mt. Aso (the highest one is Mt. Takadake, 1,592 m above sea level). The rough, barren terrain surround the volcano gradually becomes grassland as the distance widens. The Kuju Mountain Range, as a tholoid volcanic topography consisting of peaks, including Mt. Nakadake (the highest peak, 1,791 m high), reflects a diverse scenery.

Visitor Center

Chojabaru Area

- Chojabaru Visitor Center (access location with Google Map)

For further details of facilities within Aso-Kuju National Park, visit; [Facilities](#)

Due to its location in southern Japan, the climate is warmer, however if visitors plan to ascend to Mt. Aso, they will discover that there is snow on the peaks during the months of December, until late February. Warmer temperatures allow the majority of activities and experience to remain operating all year round.

- **Explore Kuju**

Walk the lush woodlands while gazing at the Kuju mountains. Beginning at the Tadewara Wetlands, where various marsh plants can be observed while trekking. The black ground; a result of field burning in the spring, carried out to maintain the wetland, is a unique landscape. Drink from the spring water at Yubiyama Yusui, one of the water sources of the Tadewara Wetlands.



Tadewara Wetlands

- **Mt. Mimata Circuit Trekking**

Witness the steam rising from the volcanic Mt. Iwo, the barren area of Kitasenrigahama with its conglomerate of rocks, where very few plants grow due to volcanic activity, the Bogatsuru Wetlands that is rich in flowers and the Tadewara Wetlands that is filled with shrubs, trees and moss.



Mt. Mimata

- **Hiking, Cycling & Driving**

There is no better way to enjoy a visit to the national park as climbing and hiking. Mountains and routes are detailed in the website of National Parks by the Ministry of Environment. Don't forget to bring appropriate footwear & gear.

For further details, visit; [Recommended Courses](#)

Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park (Miyazaki, Kagoshima)



Geographical Characteristics

Southern Kyushu, is an area of frequent volcanic activity. Even today, eruptions continue to occur, and giant calderas (depressed topography as a result of eruptions accompanied by large spurts of magma) formed by large-scale eruptions in the past can be observed.

The Kakuto and Kobayashi calderas located in the northern part of the Kirishima area, are referred to as the "Volcano Museum" due to the diverse cluster of more than 20 volcanoes, both large and small, including Mt. Karakuri (1,700 m above sea level) and Mt. Takachiho-no-mine (1,574 m above sea level). Volcanic activity remains vigorous, with Mt. Shinmoe erupting in 2011 and 2017..

Within the Kinkowan Bay area, Mt. Sakurajima to the south of the Aira caldera is a world-famous active volcano; on the southern side of the volcano lies the Ata caldera. The topography of Mt. Sakurajima continues to change tremendously due to the volcano's many eruptions, such as the large-scale eruption 100 years ago (in 1914) in which lava created a land bridge between the island and the Osumi Peninsula.

Visitor Center/Information Centers

Ebino Kogen Area

- Ebino Eco-museum Center (access location with Google Map)

Takachiho-gawara Area

- Takachiho-gawara Visitor Center (access location with Google Map)
- Kirishima City Tourist Information (access location with Google Map)

Kirishima Onsen Area

- Kirishima Onsen Tourist Information Center (access location with Google Map)

Kinkowan-oku Area

- Shigetomi-kaigan Nagisa Museum (access location with Google Map)

Sakurajima Area

- Sakurajima Visitor Center (access location with Google Map)

For further details of facilities within Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park, visit;

Facilities

- **Kinkowan Bay**

This bay is a 'caldera sea' rare in the world. It is a unique in that shallows, such as tidal flats do not form easily.



Kinkowan Bay

- **Wildlife and Nature Tour**

Kinkowan Bay is one of the rare natural 'caldera sea' locations, where the shallows allow visitors close-up encounters with rare marine creatures, as well as endangered species. Local experts are on hand to explain and point out the 'creatures of the tideland', adding a special learning experience to the visit.



Tidelands Nature Tour

- **Hiking, Cycling & Driving**

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Keramashoto National Park (Okinawa)



Geographical Characteristics

Although the Kerama Islands were originally a part of the mountains extending from the northern main island of Okinawa, a series of diastrophisms caused the land to precipitate, creating a collection of small islands as can be seen today. The inland sea of the Islands has the geographical features of a submerged shoreline, creating an archipelago landscape.

The mountain terrain approaches the coast and creates a ria coastline that abounds in imposing sea cliffs and indents. The side of the open sea has a well-developed marine landform and some areas have sea cliffs reaching 100 m to 200 m.

The geological features of the Kerama Islands belong to the Kunigami zone of the Mesozoic era including the foundations of crystalline schists, phyllites, and sandstone. The beaches facing an inland sea encompass shallow white sandy beaches consisting of coral fragments and the remains of foraminifera called star sand.

Park Characteristics

The Kerama Islands boast a wide variety of landscapes extending from the land to the sea that include seascapes of exceptionally transparent waters, reefs densely populated by various species of corals, waters where humpback whales breed, sandy beaches, sea cliffs, the vegetation unique to windy regions, and the archipelago itself. The park includes a land area of 3,520 hectares, and 90,475 hectares of ocean area, which majority of its park area is the ocean.

With great accessibility because travel time is about 35 minutes to 50 minutes via high-speed vessel from the main land of Okinawa (Tomari Port, Naha City), visitors can experience scuba diving and snorkeling in a beautiful ocean renowned as the Kerama Blue and whale watching in the winter.



Visitor Center/Information Centers

Tokashiki Area

- Tabi-no-Annanin (access location with Google Map)

Zamami Area

- Zamami Tourist Information Center (access location with Google Map)

For further details of facilities within Keramashoto National Park, visit; [Facilities](#)

• Snorkeling with Sea Turtles

Research and preservation efforts, have made the waters surrounding Kerama islands abundant with sea turtles, an endangered species.



- **Whale Watching**

The Kerama Shoto islands are home to humpback whales, and one of the few breeding grounds for humpback whales in the northern hemisphere.



Humpback Whale

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