

Yakushima

Outstanding Universal Value / Valeur universelle exceptionnelle

✓ (vii) Natural beauty / Beauté naturelle

Landscape dominated by natural forests of enormous Japanese cedars called “Yakusugi”

Paysage dominé par des forêts naturelles d'énormes cèdres Yakusugi

✓ (ix) Ecosystem / Ecosystème

Island ecosystem that exhibits the conspicuous vertical plant distribution

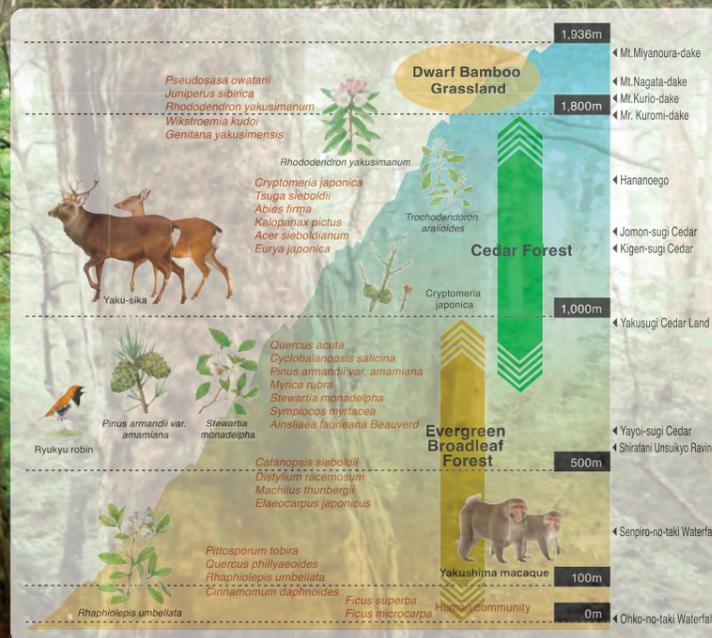
Ecosystème insulaire présentant une répartition verticale des végétaux

From Subtropical to Subalpine Zones

Despite the fact that Yakushima is situated to the south of the Japanese Archipelago, visitors here can see natural vegetation of Japan—which stretches from north to south—on this single island because it contains mountains of about 2,000 m in elevation. The vegetation in Japan is reflected in miniature along a vertical distribution, ranging from coastal vegetation with subtropical elements such as *Ficus superba* var. *japonica*, to evergreen broadleaf forest such as *Catanopsis sieboldii*, to Japanese cedar forest, to cold-temperate bamboo grassland and high moor near the mountain peaks, and to subalpine scrub forest, as elevation increases. A great variety of plants can be observed, including *Gentiana yakushimensis* that is endemic to Yakushima, Japanese cedar at its southern limit in Yakushima, and *Caesalpinia crista* at its northern limit.

A Rain-Shrouded Island

Yakushima is an island with so much rain that it is often described as “rainy 35 days a month”. It has high levels of humidity and receives more than 8,000 mm in annual precipitation, which is nearly five times the average for Japan and nearly ten times worldwide. While Japanese cedar is thought to live about 800 years at most, the cedar trees in Yakushima grow incredibly slowly owing to nutritionally-poor soil. For this reason, they have extremely precise tree rings, contain a great deal of resin, and are resistant to rotting. Many of these cedar trees live more than 1,000 years here to be called “Yakusugi”. Together with the mountain stream vegetation like *Ainsliaea fauriana* and epiphytes that are adapted to the highly humid environment, the old Yakusugi trees present distinctive forest scenery which can not be seen anywhere else in the world.



Protection and Management of Yakushima Protection du Patrimoine Naturel Mondial de Yakushima

Protected Areas in the Property

Yakushima National Park	
Special Protection Zone :	7,419 ha
Special Zone :	2,109 ha
Yakushika Wilderness Area :	1,219 ha

(Under jurisdiction of MOE)

In Yakushima, people have received the rich bounty from the mountains and the seas, revere nature, and have coexisted with nature without damaging it. Since prior to inscription on the World Heritage List, these sorts of local ways rooted in the lifestyle and culture unique to Yakushima have been compiled into the Yakushima Environmental Culture Village Concept, and have been shared by local residents, experts, and government agencies.

Following its inscription, the property has faced challenges like the impacts on the natural environment associated with increasing tourists and mountain climbers, as well as damage from Yaku-sika (endemic subspecies of sika deer), browsing on vegetation. Efforts to tackle these issues are being promoted in the aim of striking a balance between environmental protection and local development.

Examples of Efforts / Exemples d'actions



Climbing trail (former tram route for logging)

Promoting Appropriate Use Such as Measures concerning Mountain Climbers toward the Jomon-sugi Cedar Promotion de l'utilisation adéquate, à commencer par les mesures relatives à l'ascension du Jomon-sugi

Since a high-speed boat connecting the Kyushu mainland with Yakushima put into commission in 1989, the number of visitors entering the island has surged rapidly, with this trend continuing on after its inscription as well. In 2000 there were about 160,000 mountain climbers, but by 2011 this had risen to about 270,000 people. The number of mountain climbers aiming for the Jomon-sugi Cedar in particular has risen to about 90,000 people each year, which has brought about problems like the erosion of mountain trails. For this reason, the Ministry of the Environment and other relevant government agencies have begun carrying out environmental conservation measures in cooperation with local stakeholders. These include maintaining facilities like mountain trails and toilets, introducing portable toilets, instituting restrictions against bringing personal vehicles, and running mountain busses.

In addition, the Yakushima Association for the Promotion of Ecotourism was launched in 2009. It advocates for the institution of ecotours that gives visitors a real feel for the long-held lifestyles and traditions that still remain in the settlements on the island. The association also serves as a means for promoting the decentralization of use that is currently concentrated in the mountainous areas. It is moving forward with the creation of “Yakushima-rules” that compile knowledge and rules for when ecotourism is carried out on Yakushima.

Measures against Yaku-sika Mesures contre les cerfs sika

It has been said on Yakushima that there are 20,000 people, 20,000 monkeys, and 20,000 deer, with the Yaku-sika beloved as a representative wildlife of the island. For unknown reasons, the number of deer captured from about 1967 onward had declined, and as a request from the local residents, conservation measures were started that restricted their capture in 1971. After that the deer population recovered, but this led to agricultural and forestry damage. Even in the World Heritage property and its surrounding environs, the damage from deer browsing on rare and endemic plants has been growing, which has led to concerns that this will impact the forest vegetation.

Therefore, Yaku-sika Working Group was established under the Scientific Committee for the Yakushima World Heritage property in 2010 to promote countermeasures through the combined efforts of the relevant government agencies and experts. In FY2011, Yakushima Ecosystem Maintenance and Recovery Project Plan, and Kagoshima Prefecture Protection and Management Plan for Specified Wildlife (Yaku-sika Deer) were developed. Based on these plans, the Yakushima World Heritage Area Management Plan was newly formulated in 2012 and promotes deer population control to ensure an appropriate density for the protection and management of the World Heritage property. It also engages in the maintenance and restoration of ecosystems through efforts like protecting vegetation.



Yakushima Mountain Worship and Mountain Pilgrimages Les pèlerinages de montagne de Yakushima

The traditional ritual of mountain pilgrimages to Yakushima has existed since long ago, with this having been passed down to the present. Mountains in the World Heritage property such as Mt. Miyanoura-dake, Mt. Nagata-dake, Mt. Kuri-dake, Mt. Tachu-dake, and Mt. Aiko-dake are the focus of these mountain pilgrimages. People pay homage at small stone shrines erected at the summits, and pray to cast away misfortune and for peace and plentiful harvests. On Yakushima the mountains that can be seen from the villages are called maedake, or front-facing mountains, while those mountains towering in the interior that cannot be seen from the villages are called okudake, or inner mountains. A sense of reverence for okudake, where unrelenting nature unfolds and humans cannot easily approach, nurtured the mountain pilgrimage tradition.

The local residents strive to coexist with nature under these values and principles of honoring nature. This should be kept in mind as the fundamental mindset for conserving the natural environment of the Yakushima World Heritage property. In the Yakushima World Heritage Area Management Plan, conservation and management measures are based upon the values and principles of the local residents.

