

ASO-KUJU National Park

National
Parks
of Japan



www.env.go.jp/park/aso

Experience the wondrous stories spun by the majestic volcanoes
at Aso-Kuju National Park, the earth's volcanic theater.
And take home powerful,
unforgettable memories that will warm your heart.

Welcome to the earth's volcanic theater!

What a wonderful world

A magnificent natural panorama.

A place where people live peacefully surrounded by nature's abundance.

Stand here and you will never see volcanos in the same way again.

Witness the miracles they have wrought and impressive vistas that resonate to your very core.

Volcanos are mountains uplifted by the power of the heavens.

Clear spring water and hot springs, beautiful meadows and mountains,

a unique way of life and an ages-old culture.

Enter a spectacular world created by volcanos.

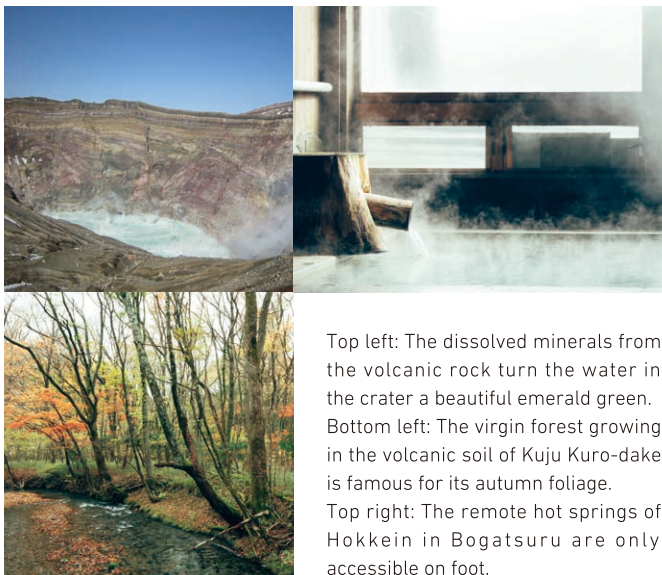
Covering an area of 726.78 square meters, Aso-Kuju National Park straddles Kumamoto and Oita Prefectures in central Kyushu. Traditional cultural practices can still be found in the Aso area in the south of the park, including a ritual dedicated to volcanic deities at a crater pond considered sacred since around the 9th century. The neighboring volcanoes of the Kuju area in the northeast are popular with sightseers for their seasonal profusion of flowers and resplendent autumn foliage, and include the Yufu-Tsurumi volcanic group that overlooks Beppu Bay.



Fumes rising from Aso Nakadake Crater

Night and day

火山
volcano

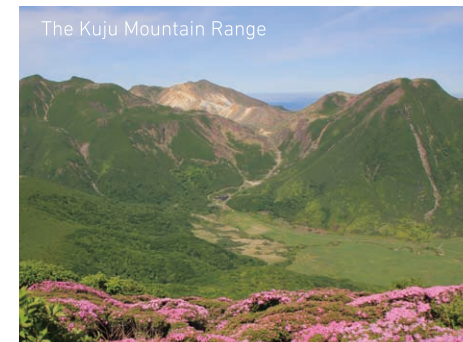


Top left: The dissolved minerals from the volcanic rock turn the water in the crater a beautiful emerald green. Bottom left: The virgin forest growing in the volcanic soil of Kuju Kuro-dake is famous for its autumn foliage. Top right: The remote hot springs of Hokkein in Bogatsuru are only accessible on foot.

Liquid the same rich color as emerald green eyes bubbles up from the depths of the crater. White fumes of smoke soar into the blue skies and diffuse into the clouds far above. The volcano is evidence that the earth is alive. Deep growls from the bowels of the earth will resound day and night, day after day, year after year, for eons into the future. Long after humankind is no more.



Mount Aso comprises a central volcanic cone that rises out of its immense caldera that extends approximately 25 kilometers north-south and 18 kilometers east-west, the surrounding crater basin, and the crater's outer rim. Steam and smoke issue from Nakadate Crater, the central volcanic cone. The crater's interior can be viewed from the rim when it is not active. The Kuju Mountain Range is a volcanic group encircling the lava dome. The surrounding, expansive plateau was created from volcanic ash and debris. Visitors can experience both the rugged, evolving landscape and the gentle grasslands at the same time.



The Kuju Mountain Range

The Kuju Mountain Range stands at an elevation of 1,700 meters. The Kuju mountain chain stretches to the west, and to the east are Mt. Taisen and the Taisen Mountain Range. In-between lies Bogatsuru Marsh. The area has long been popular with mountain climbers and tourists alike, especially in the early summer when the Kyushu azaleas bloom, and in the fall when the autumn foliage creates a rich brocade. The trails from Chojabaru on the Yamanami Highway to Mt. Taisen and Mount Kuju, and from Makinoto Pass to Kuju and beyond, are regularly maintained. Numerous other trails also meander through the Kuju mountains.

Virgin forest in the Kuro-dake mountain



Standing in the middle of the grasslands as dawn breaks,
you can watch the glimmering stars fade away.
The rays of the rising sun
illuminate the ridgeline of the Aso and Kuju mountains in bold relief.
The Japanese silver grass that stood silently in the dead of night begins to sway
in time with the invigorating tune of the early morning breeze.
The grasslands are the cradle of life.
Pristine waters spring forth to nurture and shelter the flora and fauna.
These grasslands are a gift from the distant past, sustained by both volcanoes and people.
May the swaying silver grass entice you to dance in the wind.

Volcanic plateaus, created from volcanic ash and other debris, surround Mount Aso and the Kuju Mountain Range. The plateaus' grasslands are actively maintained to prevent tree growth through mowing, burn-offs in the spring, grazing and other methods. This ensures that globe thistle, viola orientails, beardless iris, and many other rare plants thrive in this vital ecosystem.



Top: Horse trek the grasslands of the Aso-Kuju mountains.
Bottom: Take in the expanse of the outer rim of the Aso crater and the Kuju Mountain Range by cycling around the grasslands.

Softly, as in a morning sunrise

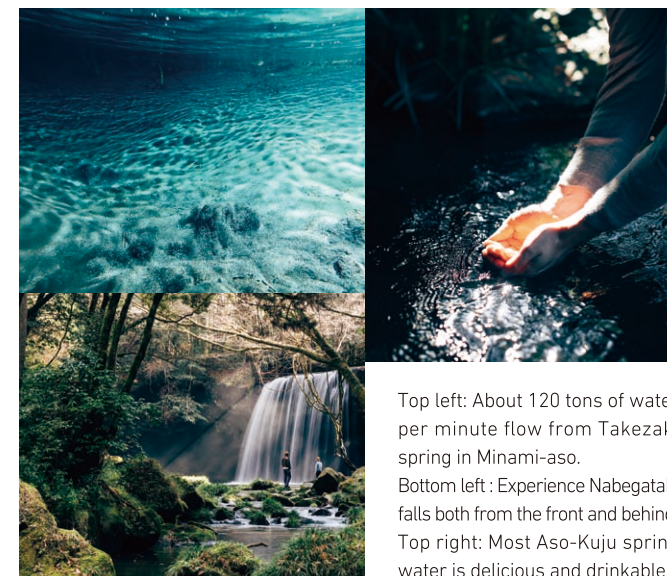
草原
grand
grassland

Grasslands at the southern foot of the Kuju Mountain Range



Oike pond at the foot of the Kuju Kuro-dake mountains

Countless springs are scattered around Mount Aso and the Kuju Mountain Range. A high concentration of springs can be found in the Aso and Nango Valleys within the caldera, at the southern foot of Mount Kuju, and in areas around the towns of Taketa and Oguni. Springs also flow in several locations on the southern, western and northern slopes of the Aso crater's outer rim. Rain and snow on the mountains seep into the earth and accumulate underground, where the water is filtered through volcanic ash and rock before it returns to the surface to sustain human lifestyles as well as the abundant plant and animal life of Aso-Kuju.



Top left: About 120 tons of water per minute flow from Takezaki spring in Minami-aso.
Bottom left : Experience Nabegataki falls both from the front and behind.
Top right: Most Aso-Kuju spring water is delicious and drinkable.

Walk under a soft patchwork of sunlight filtering through the broadleaf trees of the forests.
The murmur of flowing water mingles with the sound of gentle breezes in the trees and the chirping of small birds.
This forest has a deep, ultramarine pond steadily fed by pristine spring water filtered through the volcano.
The water that flows unceasingly from its depths becomes a brook that will gently nourish the forest for eternity.

Agua de beber

Feels like home

While roasting skewered dengaku delicacies over the hearth, the proprietress of the hot-spring inn taught us how our ancestors chose to live with nature and accept its sometimes harsh whims. Here you can relax and feel at home, thanks to the unique local culture that has been preserved for thousands of years. Time flows at its own slow pace, with people enjoying peaceful lives enriched by the blessings of nature.

Hot springs illuminated at night are a common winter scene at Kurokawa Onsen.

Climate

The local people have learned to live with the volcanoes. They have endured harsh acts of nature countless times, yet have used the distinctive characteristics of the land to their advantage to develop a culture unique to Aso-Kuju. The people have enjoyed a peaceful and abundant life almost unchanged for centuries, cooking with geothermal energy and pure spring water, relaxing in the hot springs, raising cattle and horses on the grasslands, picking edible wild plants in the mountains, and fishing in the rivers. The unhurried lifestyle of Aso-Kuju, with people living in harmony with Mother Nature, has a special power to warm the hearts of visitors.



Top left: Japanese brown and Japanese black cattle, horses and other livestock graze on the Aso grasslands. Top right: Dengaku is a local dish made with yams, masu salmon, edible wild plants and other ingredients seasoned with miso, then chargrilled as people sit around the hearth. Center left: Jigoku-mushi, a Kannawa Onsen specialty, is vegetables and seafood steamed using geothermal heat. Center right: Kannawa Onsen has long enjoyed patronage as a hot-spring resort. The small hot-spring inns lining the streets retain the nostalgic atmosphere of yesteryear. Bottom left: Age-old customs, such as washing vegetables in the river beside the open-air bath of Mangan-ji Onsen, still survive today. Bottom right: Dagojiru, an Aso specialty, is a miso-flavored stew filled with vegetables and dago, dumplings made of flour-and-water dough, which is kneaded, flattened and cut into strips.

The Seasons

Aso-Kuju National Park is ablaze with Kyushu azaleas in the spring, beautiful autumnal colors in the fall, and snow in the winter. The stunning scenery enthralls sightseers and mountain hikers alike. The region has a unique topography born of volcanic activity and is a treasure house of flora, fauna, and culture. The magnificent volcanic plateau presents a powerful, rugged landscape. Tree growth is controlled to preserve its beautiful grasslands, which are a natural habitat for globe thistle, viola orientalis, beardless iris, and other rare plants. The Aso area preserves unique time-honored customs, such as a fire-swinging ritual in a prayer for an abundant harvest.



Top left: Echinops setifer, a rare plant found in the Tadewara Marsh, blooms with spherical azure flowers in August and September. Top right: In spring the grasslands are burned in a practice dating back over a millenium to prevent trees from growing in the grasslands. Middle left: From late May through mid-June, Kyushu azaleas carpet the Aso-Kuju volcanoes in majestic purple. Middle right: Even in balmy Kyushu, hoar frost can be seen at the peak of Mount Tsurumi in Beppu, Oita Prefecture. The peak is accessible by ropeway. Bottom left: Ropes are attached to torches and swung around in the traditional Hifuri Shinji ritual at Aso shrine. Bottom right: Aso-Kuju is famous for its autumnal foliage. The mountainsides are ablaze with reds and yellows, and the plateau comes aglow with Japanese silver grass.



Access

- Haneda Airport

▶[plane(about 1 hr. 50 min.)]▶

Oita Airport

▶[bus(about 1 hr.)]▶

JR Yufuin Station(Yufuin Ekimae Bus Center)

▶[bus(about 50 min.)]▶

Kuju Tozanguchi bus stop(closest to the Chojabaru Visitor Center)
- Haneda Airport

▶[plane(about 2 hr.)]▶

Fukuoka Airport

▶[bus (about 2 hr. 30 mins)]▶

JR Yufuin Station(Yufuin Ekimae Bus Center)

▶[bus(about 52 min.)]▶

Kuju Tozanguchi bus stop (Chojabaru)
- Haneda Airport

▶[plane(about 2 hr.)]▶

Aso Kumamoto Airport

▶[bus (about 45 min.)]▶

Aso Station

Note: The access routes given are only suggestions.
For details, please inquire at the transportation companies mentioned or refer to their websites. All times are estimates.

Inquiries:

- Chojabaru Visitor Center (Kuju side)

255-33 Tano, Kokonoemachi, Kusu, Oita Prefecture 879-4911, Japan
tel 0973-79-2154
Website <http://kyushu.env.go.jp/nature/tyojyabaru/> (Japanese only)
- Aso Den'en Kukan Ecomuseum Office (Aso side)

1440-1 Kurokawa, Aso, Kumamoto Prefecture 869-2225, Japan
tel 0967-35-5077
Website www.aso-denku.jp (Japanese only)