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Take a hike: 10 of the best walks in Japan - in pictures

Whether you're seeking a short stretch of the legs or a multi-day mountain trek, Japan's walking routes are many and magnificent. Put your best foot forward with our top 10

Florentyna Leow

Main image: Mount Bandai. Photograph: Nicolas McComber/Getty Images

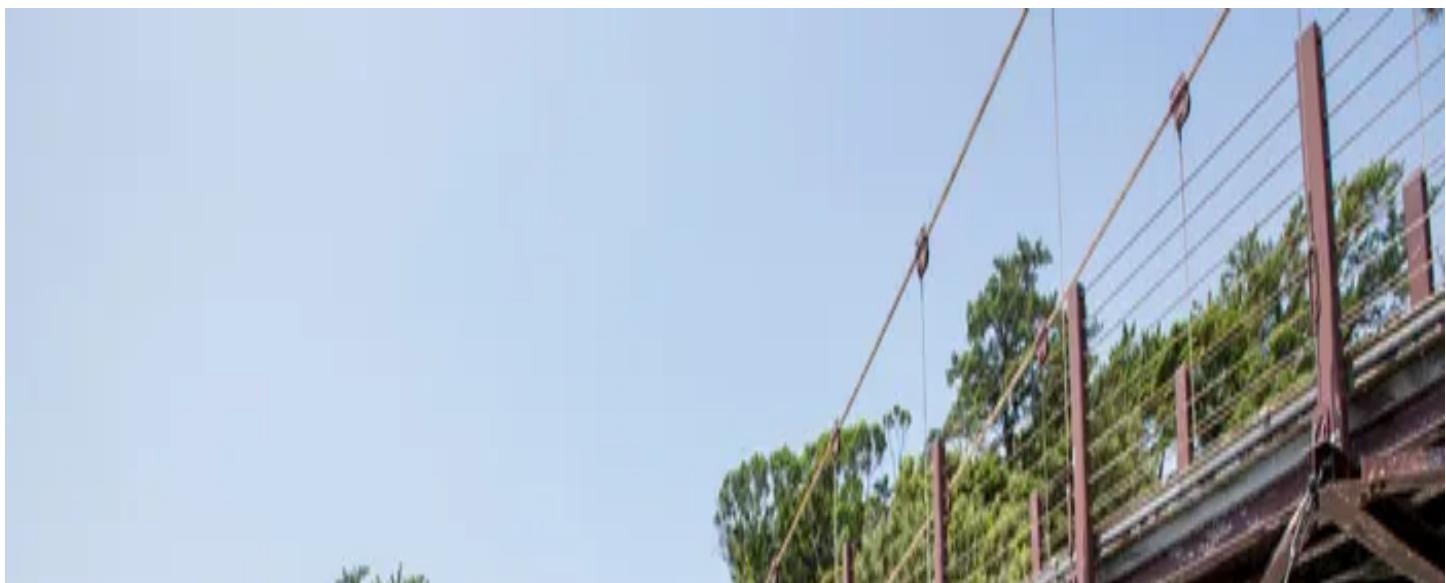
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Jogasaki coast, Izu peninsula

With its impressive coastline of jagged volcanic rock, windswept pine forest and views of the electric blue Sagami Sea, the 10km Jogasaki Kaigan trail is a fine introduction to the mountainous landscapes of the Izu peninsula. It's a two-hour train ride from central Tokyo, making it popular with day trippers. While the most-visited (and most-photographed) section is the Kadowaki suspension bridge - it's worth taking a few hours to meander along the entire trail to see the columnar jointed rocks up close, and explore the coves and rock pools dotting inlets en route.

Photograph: Tourism Shizuoka Japan





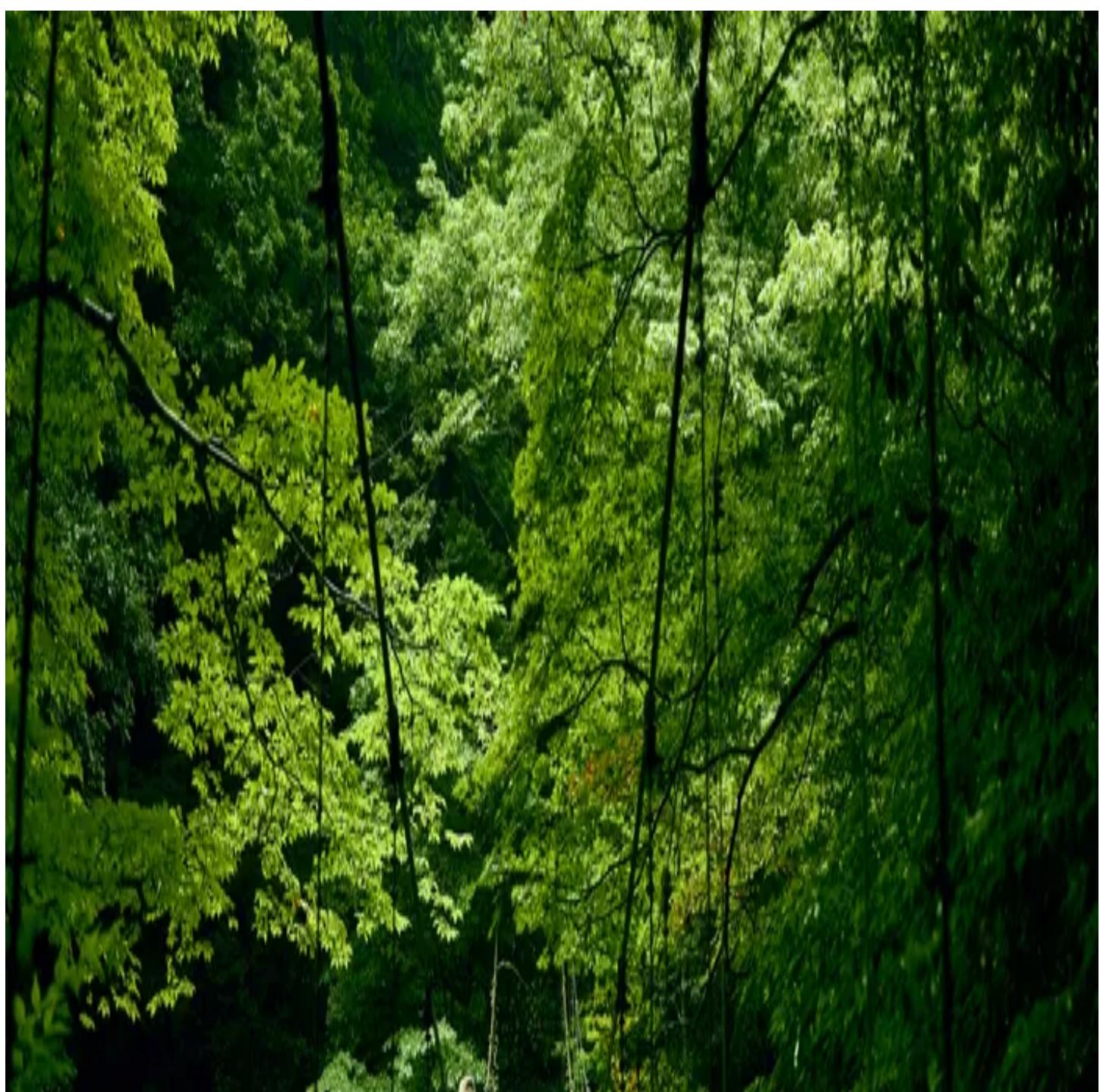


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Hatonosu valley, Okutama, Tokyo

Need a quick escape from the downtown crowds of Tokyo? Hop on a westbound train to Okutama for a walk along the Otama trail in Hatonosu valley, popular with local weekend hikers. An initial, deceptively urban start on asphalt quickly gives way to verdant footpaths and babbling brooks, and, with 8km of gentle terrain, this trail is doable for just about anyone. Try bathing in the cold, clear river during the summer months, and consider a post-hike sip of sake at Ozawa, a local brewery in Ome city that's just a 20-minute train ride from the end of the trail.

Photograph: Yoshiyoshi Hirokawa/Getty Images



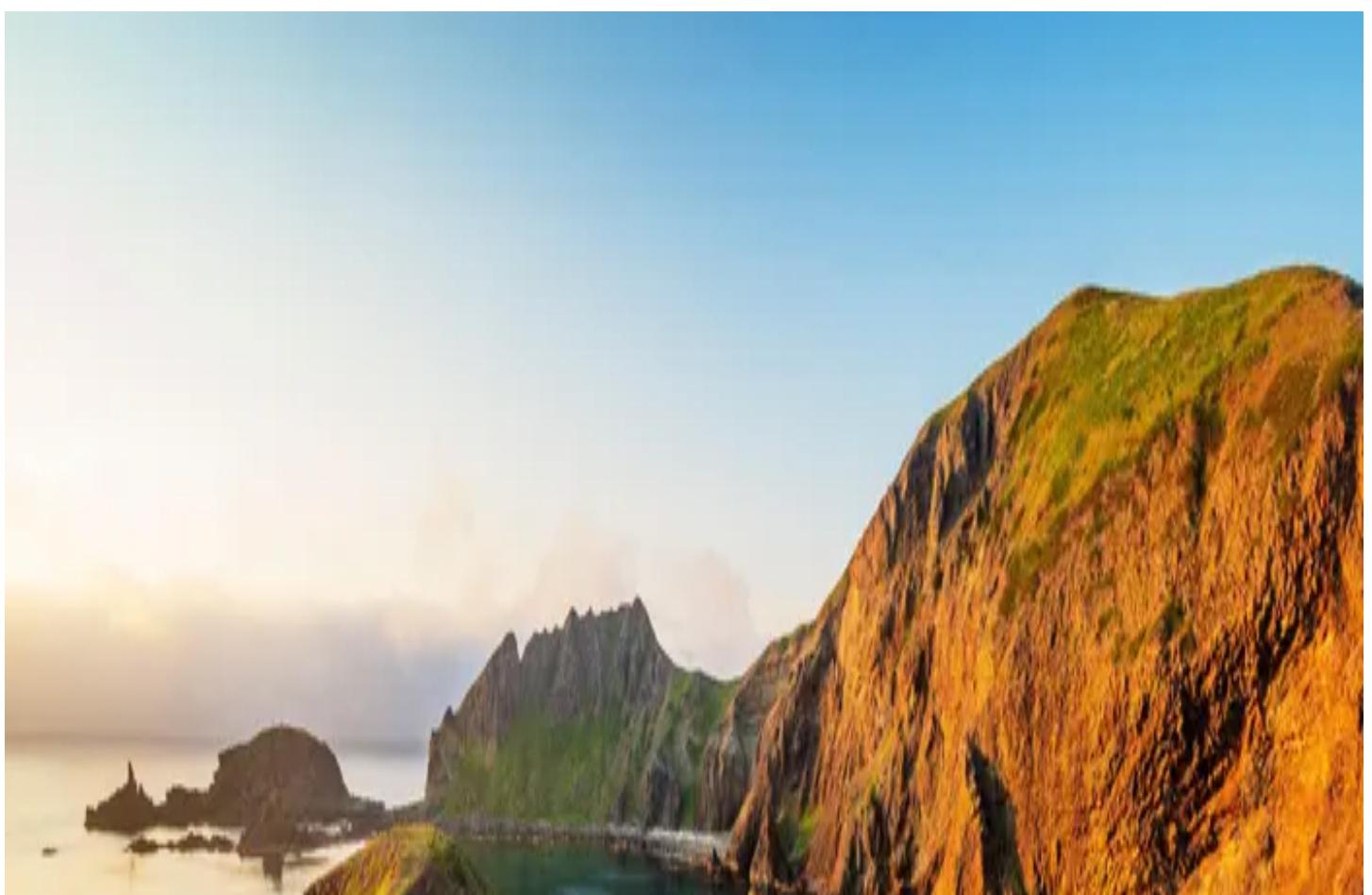


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Rebun island, Hokkaido

Though it's some 50km off the northern tip of Hokkaido, a visit to Rebun is well worth the effort of getting there, rewarding nature lovers with scenic walking and slopes blanketed in indigenous flowering plants unique to the island. After your ferry trip, wend your way around the capes, marvel at the rugged rock formations along the Momoiwa trail, or ramble across the undulating hillsides. This “island of flowers” is best visited during the mild summer months. Keep an eye out for the rare, balloon-like Rebun lady’s slipper orchid.

Photograph: robertharding/Alamy



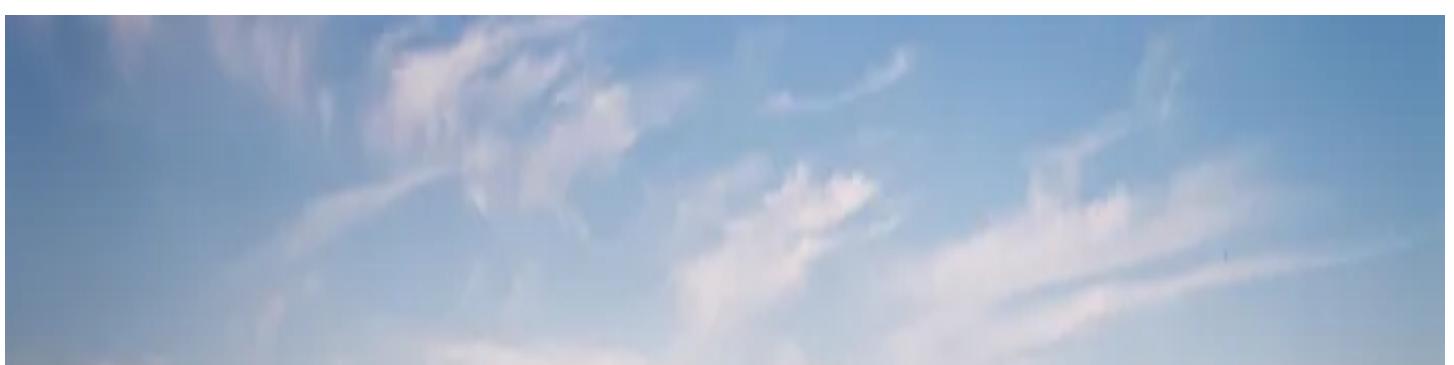


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Mount Gassan, Yamagata

The Dewa Sanzan - or “three mountains of Dewa” - are known as a centre of the Shugendo religion, whose white-clad practitioners undergo rigorous, ascetic training. Of the three mountains, Gassan - meaning “moon mountain” - is the tallest, at 1,984m. The most popular trail up to the shrine at its summit begins at the Midagahara wetlands, its boardwalks giving way to rocky, exposed trails surrounded by fields of alpine grass. Visitors must undergo a short purification ritual before entering the shrine, and thru-hikers can then continue onward to neighbouring Mount Yudono.

Photograph: Tsuruoka City





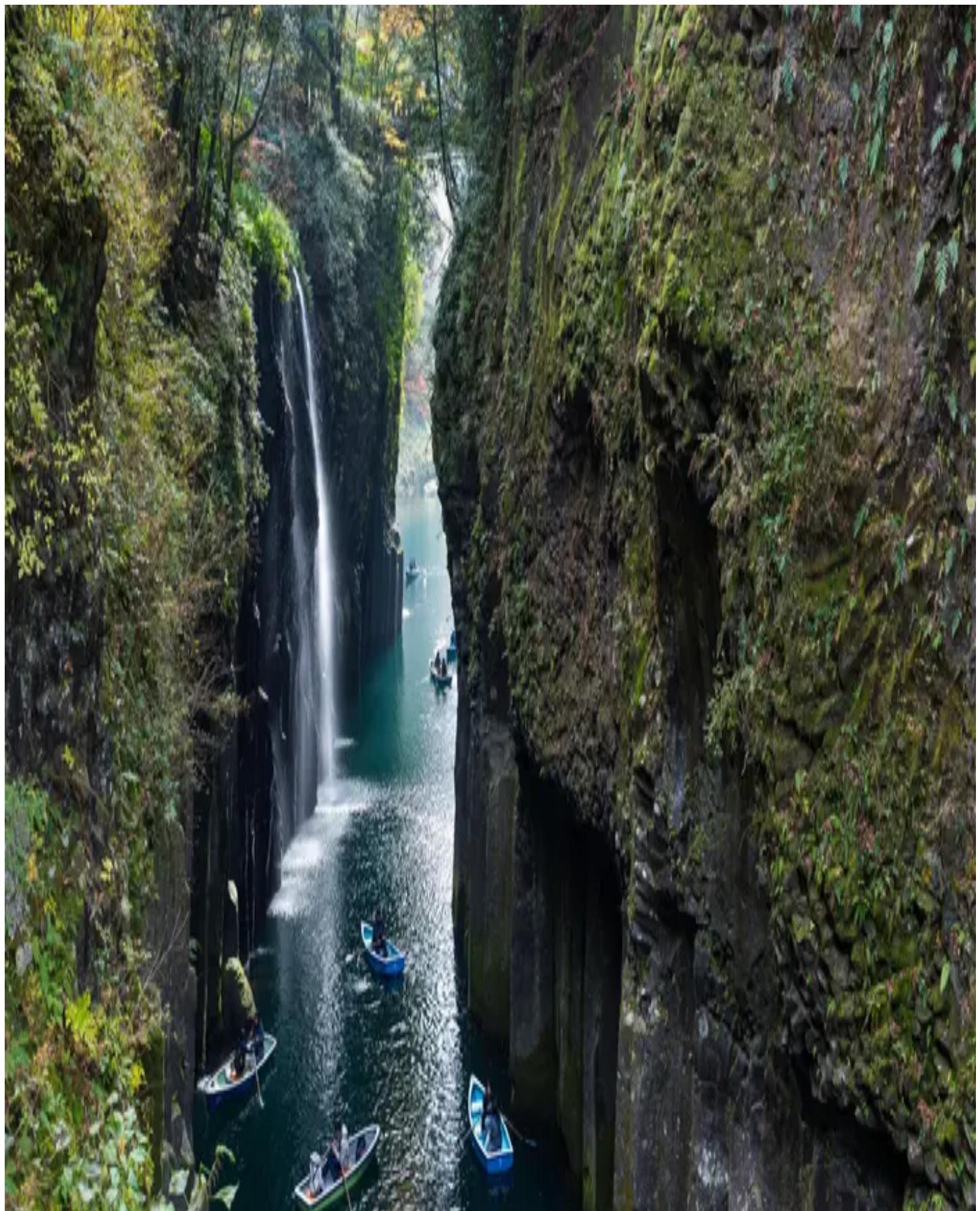
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Takachiho gorge, Miyazaki

With its basalt cliffs, forest footpaths blanketed in moss and ferns, and the waters of the Gokase River, few places in Miyazaki are as nakedly cinematic as Takachiho gorge. Visitors can take in the sights with a riverside stroll, but by renting a rowing boat you'll be rewarded with a view of the Minainotaki waterfall. Keen walkers might trek the Takachiho trail, a path taking in the Maruono tea fields, two Shinto shrines, a bamboo forest and, of course, the gorge itself along

the way. It's part of the Kyushu Olle, a series of 21 trails dotted across Honshu island.

Photograph: Panther Media GmbH/Alamy



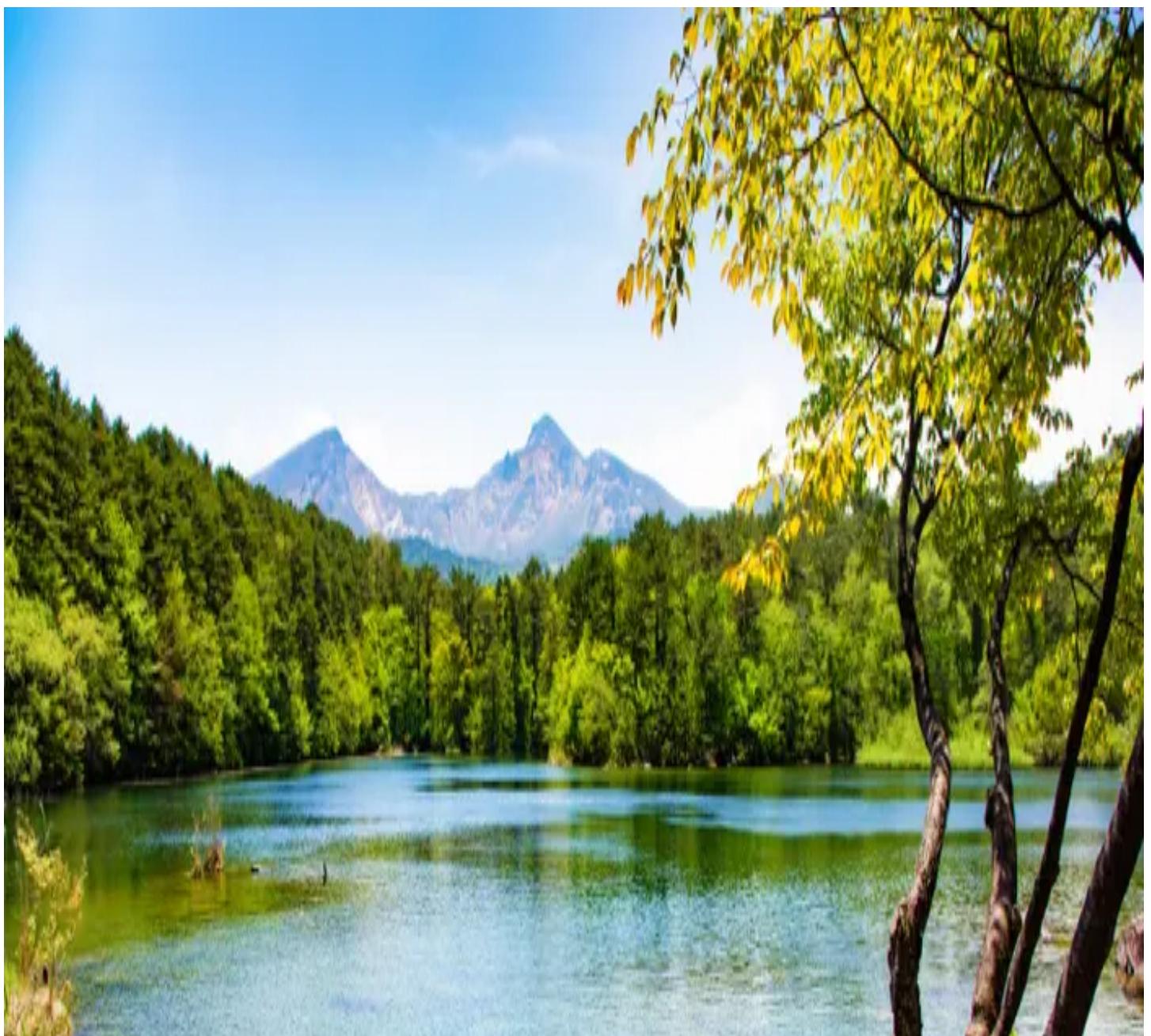


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Mount Bandai, Aizu, Fukushima prefecture

Once known as Iwahashi-yama - “the rock ladder to the heavens” - 1,816m Mount Bandai cuts a dramatic figure, towering over the glassy blue Lake Inawashiro. The mountain’s distinctive appearance was caused by a volcanic eruption in 1888, but it’s now dormant. Seven routes, from the gentler Happodai trail to the steep, rocky Shibuya trail, reward you with panoramic vistas of the Bandai plateau. Post-hike, soak your limbs in the hot springs at Numajiri Kogen Lodge, once operated by Fukushima native Junko Tabei - the first woman to climb Everest.

Photograph: NicolasMcComber/Getty Images

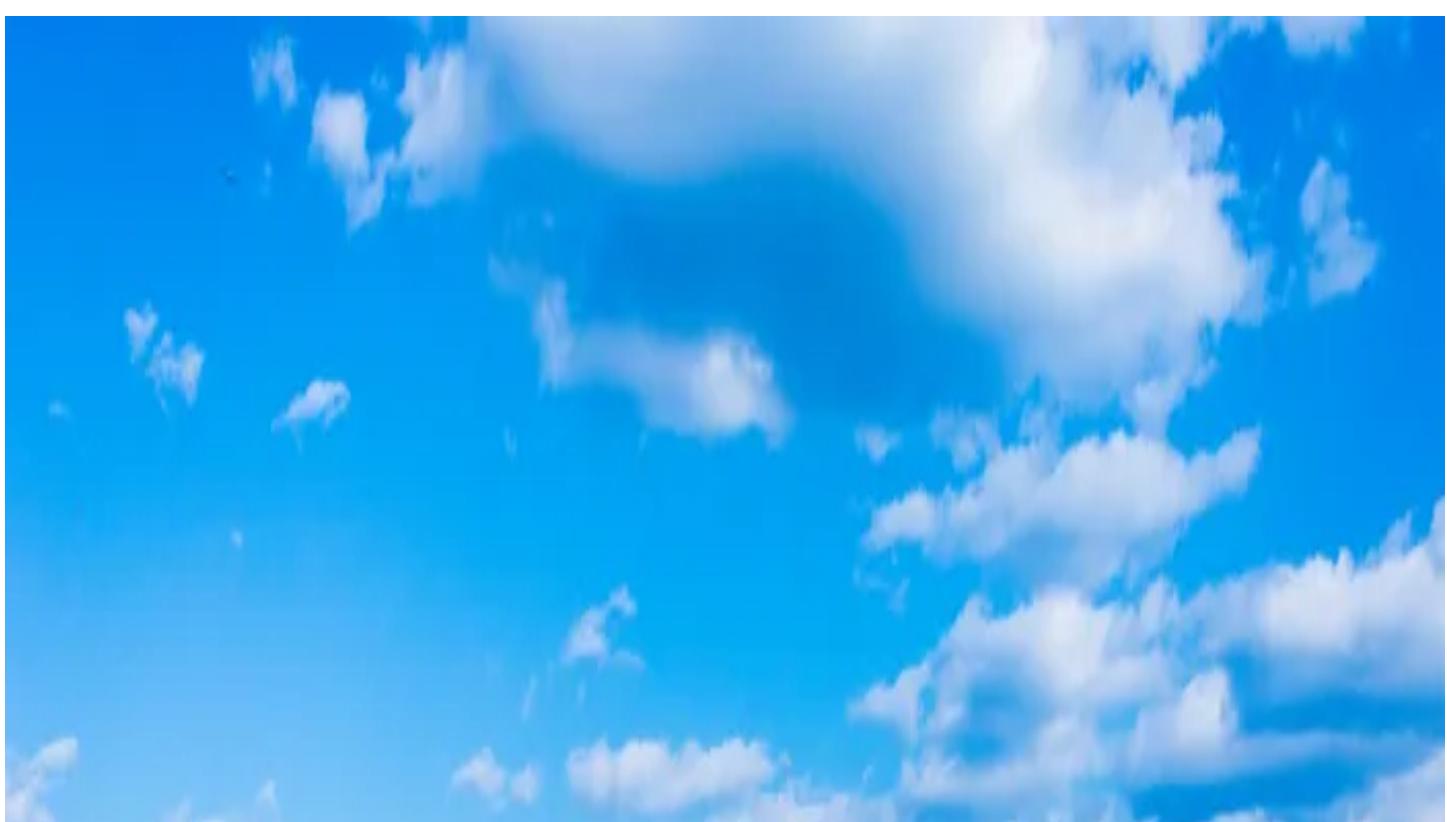




- ## Michinoku Coastal Trail, Tohoku region

Stretching more than 900km along the Pacific Ocean coastline of northeastern Honshu, the Michinoku coastal trail's scenery varies wildly as you traverse four prefectures, from jagged 2,000m cliffs and grassy knolls to dramatic seascapes and pine forests. Developed by locals to revitalise regions hardest hit by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, the trail is a wonderful way to see the underrated Tohoku region (and, of course, you don't have to hike all 900km!). *Maps can be found at the official trail website.*

Photograph: Solveig PLACIER/Getty Images/Photononstop RF



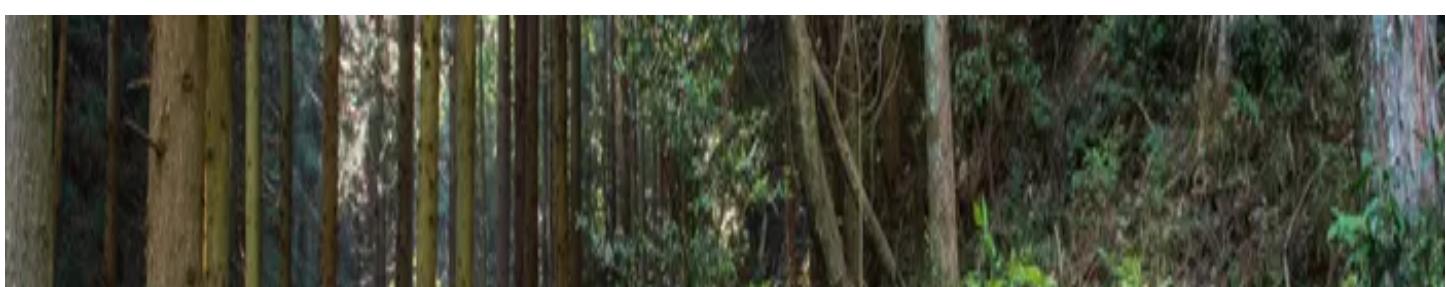


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Shikoku pilgrimage, Shikoku

With a circuit of 1,200km around the sparsely populated island of Shikoku, this 88 temple pilgrimage makes the Camino de Santiago look like a casual stroll. Established more than 1,200 years ago by followers of the Shingon Buddhist monk Kukai, it is one of the oldest pilgrimage routes in the world. You don't have to walk it for spiritual or ascetic reasons alone: with delicious local cuisine (the sanuki-style udon is unparalleled) and soaring, mountainous landscapes, Shikoku is worth a spot on anyone's Japan bucket list. Pilgrim outfit optional.

Photograph: John Steele/Alamy





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Kamikochi-Yari-Hotaka Circuit, Northern Japanese Alps

This multi-day trek takes you across some of the tallest mountains in Japan and the perilous Daikiretto knife-edge ridge, where a tiny slip can send you tumbling down a scree-covered slope. The scenery is second to none, but with plenty of steep, rocky terrain and exposed

sections, this isn't a hike to be lightly undertaken. Fortunately, you don't have to sleep under the stars - a network of mountain lodges mean you'll have a bed for the night. Less intrepid hikers may choose the easier but no less beautiful walks in the valley of Kamikochi.

Photograph: Eric Deveaux/Getty Images/iStockphoto





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