

Kinkowan Bay and  
Sakurajima

# A Taste of Primeval Japan

Known for its spectacular volcanic scenery, unique hot springs and delicious local produce, Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park makes for a unique travel experience at any time of the year.

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**K**IRISHIMA-Kinkowan National Park extends across Miyazaki Prefecture and Kagoshima Prefecture in southern Kyushu, featuring giant calderas formed by past large-scale volcanic eruptions.

Southern Kyushu, where Mt. Shinmoedake and Mt. Sakurajima are situated, has frequent volcanic activity, and eruptions continue to occur even today. The park can be broadly divided into a northern and southern parts. The northern part is known as the Kirishima area and has more than twenty volcanoes of various sizes. The southern part is known as the Kinkowan Bay (or Kagoshima Bay) area, which is centered on Mt. Sakurajima.

Many tourists visit the famous places in the Kirishima area, including the Ebino Highland, Kirishima Onsen hot spring resort, Takachihogawara and Kirishima-jingu Shrine. In the Kinkowan Bay area, people can visit the beach in a closed-off section of Kinkowan Bay, between the Osumi Peninsula and the Satsuma Peninsula, Cape Sata-misaki on the Osumi Peninsula, Mt. Kaimon, Ibusuki hot springs and Mt. Sakurajima, a legendary volcano symbolic of

the area's unique scenery.

Formed approximately 26,000 years ago, Mt. Sakurajima is a symbol of the park, rising 1,117 meters above sea level. This active composite volcano has two peaks, Kita-dake (northern peak) and Minami-dake (southern peak), encompassing 80 square kilometers in total with a circumference of approximately 52 kilometers. Mt. Sakurajima is a major tourist destination that continues to attract visitors from within Japan and abroad, particularly because it offers an opportunity to feel the heartbeat of the earth.

Mt. Sakurajima has experienced major eruptions since its formation. As the name implies ("jima" means island in Japanese), Mt. Sakurajima was originally an island floating in Kinkowan Bay. The massive lava flows from the 1914 eruption created a land bridge between the island and the Osumi Peninsula, located on the eastern side of the bay. The eruption was so devastating that it buried neighboring Kurokami town located to the east of Mt. Sakurajima overnight under ash and volcanic pumice stones.

Haragosha Shrine in Kurokami town has about two thirds of its three-meter-high *torii* (shrine gate) buried beneath the ashes. Later it was named Kurokami Buried Torii, and has since been preserved as a reminder of the devastating eruption that should be passed on to future generations. The sacred structure has been designated as a natural monument of Kagoshima Prefecture.

Takatoge Pass (550 meters above sea level) is



A communal *suna mushi* sand bath



Mt. Kaimon viewed across blossoming *nanohana* field mustard

located to the east of Mt. Sakurajima, and is one of the vista points on the Osumi Peninsula from which visitors can enjoy a magnificent panoramic view of Mt. Sakurajima and Kinkowan Bay. Cape Sata-misaki at the tip of the peninsula is the southernmost point of Kyushu, where many subtropical plants grow along the path. If the weather permits, visitors can enjoy a view of Yakushima, a UNESCO World Heritage Site famed for its ancient cedar trees, as well as Tane-gashima, the rocket-launch complex of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).

Lake Ikeda, a caldera lake located on Satsuma Peninsula, across from Osumi Peninsula, is the biggest volcanic lake in Kyushu. Giant *unagi* (eels) live there. The eels grow up to 1.8 meters long, 60 centimeters at their thickest, and 20 kilograms in weight. Beautiful fields of flowers including bright yellow *nanohana* (field mustard) spread along the lakeshore each January, lending their name to the popular Ibusuki Nanohana Marathon. This is a popular scenic spot among joggers and cyclists.

South of the Satsuma Peninsula is Nishi-Oyama Station – now an unmanned station – Kyushu’s southernmost train station, which has become a pilgrimage site for railway enthusiasts. Many come seeking verification of their visit issued by the Ibusuki Tourism Association.

There is a unique yellow post box at the station, inspired by *nanohana*, a symbolic flower of the area. It is popular among those wishing to send letters to their loved ones. *Nanohana* blossoms are at their peak from late December through February. Visitors can enjoy a magnificent view of Mt. Kaimon beyond the fields of flowers, which makes the area a popular spot for photography.

Mt. Kaimon is a volcanic mountain at the

southernmost tip of the Satsuma Peninsula, rising 924 meters above sea level. It is often called “Mt. Satsuma Fuji” because of its resemblance to Mt. Fuji in terms of its elegant conical shape overlooking the sea. From the top of Mt. Kaimon, visitors can enjoy a panoramic view of the renowned places in the Kirishima area in the north and Yakushima in the south. It is also possible to enjoy a bicycle ride on the scenic path that circles the mountain. Ibusuki-onsen Hot Spring is located to the east of Mt. Kaimon. It has remained very popular for decades because of its *suna mushi* sand baths that are difficult to find elsewhere in the world.

Visitors enjoy sand bathing by simply burying themselves in the hot sand on the beach for 10 minutes, long enough for healthy perspiration. Sand baths offer an excellent full-body detox and are known to have a skin-beauty effect, exhibit the effect to improve atopic dermatitis, and cure arthritis and back problems. Past volcanic activity created not only a magnificent landscape and hot springs, subsequent eruptions had an enormous impact on the topography and geology of southern Kyushu, such as the Shirasu-Daichi (pyroclastic plateau) formed by sediment from falling ash and pyroclastic flows accompanied by past large-scale eruptions of Mt. Sakurajima.

Shirasu-Daichi features good drainage. Sakurajima *komikan* (oranges), Sakurajima *daikon* (radishes) and Satsuma *imo* (sweet potatoes) are among the local delights famous nationwide. Satsuma *shochu* (Japanese distilled spirits) made from Satsuma imo is very popular and has been designated by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a geographical indication protection. Enjoy a glass of Satsuma *shochu* while sand bathing in front of Kinkowan Bay on your trip to the park. 🍷