



- Explore the regions -



Tastes of JAPAN by ANA has won the award for Tourism Business (Field of Domestic and Inbound Travel) from Tourism EXPO Japan 2016, supported by Japan Tourism Agency and others.



Of Mt. Takao's seven walking paths, No. 1 is rather easy for light hiking by visitors of all ages.

# On the Trail to a Sacred Site of Rich Savor

Story by Mayumi Ishii, with Eugene Tarshis  
Photographs by Mayumi Ishii

The cosmopolitan metropolis of Tokyo is known for its unique combination of cutting-edge style, fashion, food, music, and shopping. But just beyond the city, sometimes within its metropolitan bounds, are experiences of nature at

its finest and a renowned temple with historic influence and unique craft traditions as well as vegetarian cuisine special to Buddhist practice known as *shojin ryori*.

Tokyo

## Ascent to Heavenly Food on High

Tokyo is a megacity of Japanese style and hospitality as well as international influence seen in its food, music and art. Within the city are calm gardens, but just beyond or within the metropolitan area are landscapes replete with nature. One such place is in southwestern Hachioji City:



Mt. Takao's rich nature has trees that are hundreds of years old.

Mt. Takao. This popular peak near the city rewards visitors from Japan and overseas with scenes of seasonal beauty and charm. With easy ascent up its 599 meters, Takaosan, its Japanese name, got a three-star rating from *Michelin Japan: The Green Guide*.

Proximity to the city means a one-hour train ride to Takaosanguchi Station, located at the foot of the mountain. From there, you can walk its accessible trails or relax for 10 minutes in the cable car taking you near the mountain observatory.

A cable-car announcement told us that "Mt. Takao is home to 1,500 kinds of plants and 5,000 kinds of insects," as we ascended the steepest slope in Japan, a 31-degree angle. Soon arriving at the cable car's



The cable car at Mt. Takao ascends the steepest slope in Japan.

Takaosan Station at 472 meters, we walked the remaining way up.

I climbed the gentle trail, gazing at lovely cryptomeria and beech trees, and arrived at Takaosan Yakuo-in Yuki-ji. This Buddhist temple of the Shingon Sect has had historic importance since its founding by charismatic priest Gyoki in 744 as ordered by Emperor Shomu. One of three head temples today of the Chisan School of Shingon,



Shojin ryori at Yakuo-in's vegetarian restaurant

Yakuo-in maintains its link since the 14th century with *shugendo*, a mountain ascetic practice associated with two temple statues of *tengu*, long-nosed mythic beings who protect hallowed ground from evildoers with ferocious aspect that delights visitors of all ages.

Also of divine aspect is seating in a



Entrance gate to Yakuo-in

Japanese house for enjoyment of Buddhist vegetarian cuisine known as *shojin ryori*. Deciding to lunch here, I was guided to a quiet room and served homemade preparations of seasonal vegetables and wild delectables on lacquerware dishes. Dining on this nutritious and delicious food in a relaxed atmosphere eased my fatigue and left me fully satiated.

Inigorated for the 15-minute walk from Yakuo-in, I reached the capacious mountaintop and its panorama of distant Tokyo across deep blue skies, a view said to include Mt. Fuji on a clear day. I received the Takao-san map of seven main trails from a staffer at the visitor center, who advised, "Difficulty and scenery vary by route, and there's a suspension bridge on Trail 4." I learned that route I took was the easy-to-hike Trail 1. Descending by a different trail



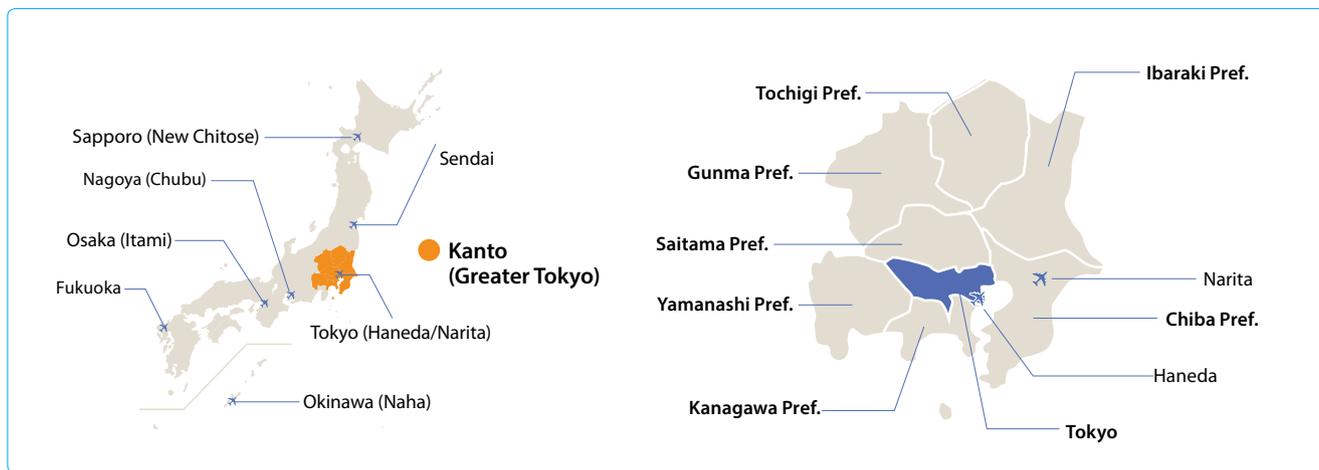
View from atop Mt. Takao

pleasantly ended a journey inspiring for its spiritual and savory experience of a heavenly place close to the big city.



**Note:** Hours and dates may vary for *shojin ryori* service, so please confirm them beforehand by calling 042-661-1115 (in Japanese).

**Getting There:** ANA daily serves Tokyo (Haneda and Narita) with many direct flights from airports around Japan. It takes about an hour by express trains from Tokyo Station to Takaosanguchi Station via Shinjuku Station.



**Looking Ahead**

The next theme for Get to Know Kanto (Greater Tokyo) in February is Sightseeing, when we introduce plums in Kairaku-en, Ibaraki Pref., and cherry blossoms, temples, and shrines in Kamakura, Kanagawa Pref.

**Handy URL**

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