



- Explore the regions -



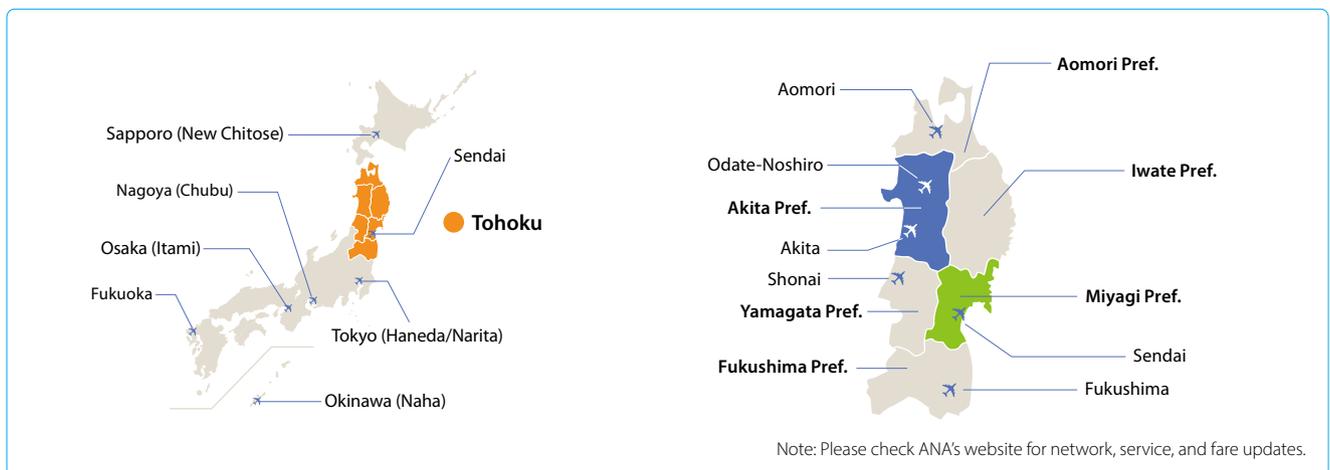
1 The rare and beautiful Dragon Eye is forming on Kagami Pond, Akita Pref.

2 Lotus flowers at Izunuma. Photo courtesy of Miyagi Prefecture Tourism Division.

Bountiful Nature in Dramatic Landscape

The northern region of Tohoku abounds with mountains and lakes plus unique natural features sure to inspire visitors. Among Akita Prefecture's charms are a national park with a renowned volcanic area and a snowmelt phenomenon known

as Dragon Eye. And when it comes to flora and fauna, Miyagi Prefecture is home to a wide array of waterfowl and aquatic birds as well as biodiverse wetlands and more.



Akita Pref.

Peak Experience of Rare Beauty

Towada-Hachimantai National Park is a beautiful and nature-filled area of mountains, lakes, and streams ranging over Aomori, Akita, and Iwate prefectures in the Tohoku region while incorporating the Towada-Hakkoda region (Mt. Hakkoda, Towada Lake, and Oirase Keiryu). On the Akita and Iwate prefectures' side of the park is the Hachimantai



Dragon Eye is a phenomenon created by snow melting in a ring, seen here with "black eye," at Kagami Pond, near the summit of Mt. Hachimantai.

region (Hachimantai, Mt. Akita-Komagatake, and Mt. Iwate), one of Japan's leading volcanic zones, rising to 1,613 meters, with Hachimantai plateau, a wetland, and many swamps.

Near the summit of Mt. Hachimantai, at Kagami Pond, the fortunate visitor just might see—for only two weeks a year—the stunning Dragon Eye phenomenon created by snow melting in a ring. During the winter, the pond is covered over with snow. In late May, when the mountains here get a glimpse of spring, snowmelt water flows into the pond, revealing the water's surface gradually from the outside rim. Eventually an island of snow remains at center, and the pond appears to take on a round, almost donut-like shape.

As many see this as something of a giant eye, it has come to be called "Dragon Eye." This Dragon Eye can be seen only during snowmelt season, which means you must walk from the summit rest house via a pathway with some residual snow—no worries, as the service center rents rubber boots. Please note that the Eye may not appear some years, due to weather conditions. Whether or not you'll witness the majestic Dragon Eye is up to your luck!

Getting There: ANA serves Akita Airport daily from Tokyo (Haneda), Osaka (Itami), Nagoya (Chubu), and Sapporo (New Chitose). Travel by car to the pond from the airport is about 2 hours and 40 minutes.

Miyagi Pref.

Sustainable Home to Birds and Plants

Miyagi Prefecture's Izunuma-Uchinuma is the largest natural lake in the Tohoku region, spreading near the borders of Kurihara and Tome cities in the north of the prefecture. It has been designated a Ramsar Convention site, the second in Japan (following Kushiro Shitsugen, or the Kushiro Wetland, in Hokkaido). The convention is set up as a framework for maintaining and protecting sustainability and biodiversity in wetlands, where waterfowl are at the top of the food chain.

This area has relatively little snowfall compared to the rest of the Tohoku region, and the marshes do not freeze even during mid-winter, making it a hospitable environment for aquatic birds to pass the winter. Some 3,000 whooper swans therefore migrate to this inviting biome every year—quite a spectacle to watch from the banks of the marsh as whooper swans flying overhead.

Water depth averages 80 cm, reaching 1.6 m at most, so various aquatic plants thrive. Small white *gagabuta* (water snowflakes) and yellow *asaza* (*Nymphoides peltate*) are seen blossoming in summer. Particularly beautiful are lotus flowers blooming mid-July through late August, painting the marsh a vivid pink. The sight of all these flowers appearing at once is breathtaking. Hasu Matsuri (Lotus Festival), held during the lotus flowering season, has small pleasure boats for leisurely rides to view up close the blossoms that fill the pond. As flowers open in the morning and close by noon, it's best to visit during the earlier hours.



White swans enjoy Izunuma, a wetland habitat perfectly suited for sustaining migratory birds. Photo courtesy of Miyagi Prefecture Tourism Division.

Getting There: ANA serves Sendai Airport daily from Tokyo (Narita), Osaka (Itami), Nagoya (Chubu), Sapporo (New Chitose), and Fukuoka. From the airport, it takes about 2 hours by the bullet train and car, or about 1 hour and 15 minutes by car, to reach the area.

Looking Ahead

The next theme will be an Area Guide to the Kansai region in September, when we introduce six prefectures and their characteristic features.

Handy URL

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