



# 青木林

THE BLUE FOREST

AN UNEXPLORED REGION



AOMORI  
JAPAN





## THE BLUE FOREST AOMORI

### AOMORI PREFECTURE IS JAPAN'S BEST-KEPT SECRET.

The northernmost region on the Island of Honshu, this remote and exotic area has remained largely unexplored by Australian travellers. The few English speakers who have discovered Aomori know it affectionately as The Blue Forest, and it is quickly earning a place on many globetrotters' itineraries. The prefecture's stunning natural beauty, cultural attractions and archaeological sites make it a major drawcard all



year round. Aomori remains unspoiled by mass tourism, and traditional industries such as farming, forestry and fishing still dominate. As such it affords adventurous travellers with a truly authentic Japanese experience long missing from the more well-worn tourist trails. A visit is a must for any serious traveller but be quick, it won't stay a secret for long!

Use this brochure as a guide to discover **the top ten things in Aomori Prefecture.**





No journey to Aomori Prefecture is complete without uncovering the natural wonders of Oirase Gorge. A walking trail follows the picturesque Oirase Stream, which has more than a dozen waterfalls, and is equally spectacular in spring, summer and autumn. The path is suitable for hikers of all skill levels and you'll be among the first Australians to walk it. Oirase Stream is an outlet draining the gorgeous Lake Towada. Honshu's largest crater lake is 2,000 years old and a landscape photographer's dream. The fall foliage surrounding Lake Towada in autumn is one of the most beautiful in Japan, and relatively unknown among Australian travellers. The area also features the tranquil Tsutanuma Pond.

## 1. STROLL AROUND OIRASE GORGE

Tsutanuma Pond



## 2. ENJOY A VIEW OF THE HAKKODA MOUNTAINS

The Hakkoda Mountains are a volcanic mountain range just a short drive south of Aomori City. Made up of dozens of richly vegetated stratovolcanoes and lava domes, a pilgrimage to this ancient landscape is a majestic and spiritual experience. Many Australians are familiar with the world-class ski fields of northern Japan, but the exceptional summer beauty of the mountains is yet to be discovered. Gorgeous scenery can be seen and photographed all year round with the virgin forest and alpine flora offering stunning views of reds, golds and oranges throughout spring, summer and autumn. The gondola will take you deep into the mountains on your quest for the perfect photo spot.





### 3. BATHE IN THE HOT SPRINGS

There's no better way to discover how the locals live than a relaxing soak in an iconic hot spring, or onsen in Japanese. Aomori lays claim to the best and quirkiest in Japan. The Sukayu Onsen is home to several, including the Sen-nin-buro, or thousand-person bath, a large mixed gender hot spring. This thoroughly traditional establishment is popular with locals of all ages who enjoy the therapeutic benefits of the sulphur infused water. First time onsen visitors can sometimes find the experience a little intimidating but newcomers are warmly welcomed and special times of the day are set aside exclusively for women. Special bathing dresses are also available.



Sukayu Onsen



#### 4. STAY IN A JAPANESE-STYLE HOTEL

The perfect accompaniment to a long soak in the hot springs is to stay at a ryokan, a traditional Japanese inn. Once serving highway travellers during the historic Edo period, these delightfully authentic establishments now take great pride in welcoming visitors from around the world. Ryokan typically feature tatami matted rooms and serve kaiseki ryori, Japanese haute cuisine featuring fresh seasonal delicacies from around Aomori. Donning the comfortable yukata, or casual kimono, provided by the inn is a photo opportunity not to be missed. Friendly Aomori locals are always happy to help newcomers discover the traditional customs of the ryokan.



Don't miss the sensationally succulent scallop sashimi!

Lamp no Yado Aoni-onsen



## 5. TAKE PART IN THE AOMORI NEBUTA FESTIVAL

Legend has it the Aomori Nebuta Festival originated from extravagant spectacles created by Shogun generals to distract the enemy during battle. Contemporary revellers embrace that spirit with enthusiasm, creating a sensory assault of light, colour and sound. The parade sees massive lantern floats depicting famous mythological figures pulled through the streets accompanied by dancers and musicians. The emphasis is very much on participation, with visitors encouraged to discover the traditions of Nebuta Festival by renting or buying the haneto dancing costume and joining in the procession. Locals consider it the most important date on the calendar and the event that best represents Aomori culture. For those unable to make it to Aomori in August, the Nebuta Warasse museum recreates the festival's spirit throughout the year.







Be one of the first Australians to visit one of the quirkiest and unique attractions in Japan. During the warmer seasons farmers in the small village of Inakadate employ paddy fields as their canvas and coloured rice as their paint to create massive works of landscape art. Pieces include both traditional Japanese designs as well as contemporary pop culture subjects. The striking murals have garnered media interest around the world and many villages throughout Japan have mimicked the practice. But Inakadate remains the true home of the biggest and best displays.

## 6. CHECK OUT RICE PADDY MASTERPIECES

Rice Paddy Art in Inakadate Village



## 7. GO CHERRY BLOSSOM VIEWING

The cherry blossom (sakura) season in Japan is quite simply unmissable. And as home to more than 2,600 sakura trees, there's no better viewing destination than Hirosaki Castle. The viewing in Aomori is quite different to the rest of Japan, and many Japanese rank this magical phenomenon as the thing they would most like to experience before dying. With the three-story castle surrounded by fortified moats and framed with the pink sakura, visitors are transported back in time to an enchanted era. Go to the west moat to rent a boat and view the spectacular blossoms from the water. Or, stroll the castle grounds at night when the cherry blossom trees are illuminated to cast a mystical pink glow over the entire surrounding area.



Hirosaki Castle



## 8. CHECK OUT THE LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL ART

Aomori is quickly becoming a powerhouse of the international art scene. The region is home to numerous talented artists such as Yoshitomo Nara and travellers delight in discovering a burgeoning art scene in a unique natural setting. The prefecture is taking advantage of its growing reputation by transforming Towada Kanchogai Street, best known as a scenic cherry blossom spot, into a world-class outdoor gallery. In spring you can view work from internationally renowned artists such as Yayoi Kusama positioned spontaneously along the path while enjoying the cherry blossoms overhead. Be sure to check out the Towada Art Center where you can view work by high-profile artists, including Australian sculptor Ron Mueck, inside and outside the exhibition rooms through glass walkways. The centre also features three outdoor art parks with intriguing creations waiting to be discovered.



Towada Art Center



## 9. SLURP A BOWL OF NIBOSHI RAMEN

With Sapporo, famous for its miso-flavoured ramen, just a few hours travel away, Aomori's niboshi ramen is often overlooked. Foodies ignore niboshi ramen at their own peril, as they risk being the last to discover a trendy dish in the ramen world. Also known as Tsugaru Ramen, the broth is concocted from a stock based on small, dried sardines. "Noukou Niboshi Kei" is a twist on the classic with a kick. It combines the traditional light niboshi stock with a thicker broth made out of torigara (chicken stock) or tonkotsu (pork bones). Either way, one bowl will make you realise why the locals are so hopelessly addicted.

Ask for "Assari" for a light flavour...



... and "Noukou" for a rich flavour.





## 10. VISIT AOMORI'S WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Aomori Prefecture is home to the Shirakami Mountain Range, the largest remaining beech forest in Asia. The mountainous, unspoiled expanse was registered as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site in 1993 for good reason. The unspoiled region hosts unique plants and rare animals including the Japanese goat-antelope and magnificent golden eagle. Shirakami-Sanchi is also home to the mysterious inky blue waters of Aoike Pond. The central, protected sections of this World Heritage Site have remained largely closed to human activity and the ecosystem is so delicate that visitors are asked to gain permission from Forest Management before entering. The tight restrictions ensure you'll be among the first Australians to discover this natural wonder.

Aoike Pond, Lake Juniko



# TOP 10 THINGS TO DISCOVER IN AOMORI

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**By Shinkansen (Bullet Train):**  
Tokyo Sta. → Shin-Aomori Sta. 3 hrs

**By Air:**  
Tokyo → Aomori 1 hrs 15 mins  
Osaka → Aomori 1 hrs 30 mins  
Seoul → Aomori 2 hrs 20 mins

