

# Guide Book

## Michinoku Coastal Trail Ishinomaki (Kitakami, Kahoku, Ogatsu) Section

### ① Shirahama Beach Park and Kashima-jinja Shrine

(Map title: Shirahama Swimming Beach, Shirahama Beach Park, Kashima-jinja Shrine (Beer Shrine))

In addition to the white sand beach, Shirahama Beach has a park with picnic and barbecue areas and hosts a wide variety of seasonal outdoor activities for visitors, including dragnet fishing from March through September.

Nearby Kashima-jinja Shrine is reputedly home to a somewhat picky deity. According to legend, local residents would traditionally make

ritual offerings of unfiltered sake (*doburoku*) to the deity. One year, however, the rice yield was so poor that they had to offer alcohol made from wheat instead. The following year, the rice crop was bountiful. The community expressed its gratitude with a traditional offering of sake, only to suffer a sudden outbreak of illness and injury. Putting their heads together, they came to the conclusion that the deity of this shrine preferred wheat-based offerings to rice-based sake. This preference earned Kashima the nickname the Beer Shrine, and to this day, worshippers still bring offerings of beer.

Kashima-jinja Shrine was washed away by the 2011 tsunami, but the foundation of the original structure is still visible, and many of the monuments lost in the disaster have since been recovered.



## ② Ishinomaki Riverside Visitor Center/ Kitakami Tourism and Product Exchange Center

Opened in April 2018, the Ishinomaki Riverside Visitor Center is a great place to take a break from walking the Michinoku Coastal Trail and learn about the natural wonders of the Sanriku region. Created as part of Sanriku Fukko (Reconstruction) National Park, the center provides a wealth of information about the area's sights, wildlife, ocean, forests, hiking routes and more and organizes seasonal outdoor activities for visitors.



Built from local materials, the facility features a main hall—where visitors can peruse helpful multilingual pamphlets and family-friendly educational exhibits—and includes a lounge area, restrooms, shower rooms, and a garden with a pond.

From the parking lot, visitors can begin the hike to Obandaira, a mountaintop grassland which offers panoramic views of the surrounding area.

For anyone interested in taking home treats or crafts, the gift shop\* next door sells local specialty goods that make excellent souvenirs.

\* the gift shop=Kitakami Tourism and Product Exchange Center

## ③ Tsurishi-jinja Shrine

The object of worship at Tsurishi-jinja Shrine is a 14-meter-long stone balanced precariously on the side of a cedar-covered hill. Said to be inhabited by a deity of knowledge, this megalith seems poised to tumble from its gravity-defying perch but has stayed put throughout the ages, even withstanding the massive tremors of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. Many students come here to wish for good exam results, in part because “fail” and “fall” can be expressed by the same Japanese word. Like this stone, they hope never to “fall” in their studies and exams.



Reflecting its proximity to the Kitakami River, Tsurishi-jinja Shrine is decorated with reeds harvested from the riverbank throughout the year. The shrine offers school-related charms (omamori) as well as votive pictures (ema) on which worshippers write the hopes and dreams they seek divine assistance in realizing.

## ④ Maruyama Jizo

Jizo is a Buddhist deity said to watch over travelers and children, and Jizo statues can be seen all over Japan. They are typically quite small and are often dressed with a red knit cap and bib. The Maruyama

Jizo was erected in 1801 to honor the spirits of people who died in the Tenmei Famine (1782–1788) and as a focus of prayers for bountiful harvests. Counting its pedestal, it rises to a height of 3 meters, quite large for a Jizo statue.

Although the massive tsunami of 2011 inundated the area, the Maruyama Jizo was not washed away, and it has come to be seen as a symbol of resilience. Not far from the statue are a small information center and a local community center called We Are One Kitakami.

## ⑤ Kitakami River

The Kitakami River flows for over 250 kilometers, and is the largest river in the Tohoku region, as well as the fourth largest in Japan. It flows from its source in Iwate Prefecture through Miyagi Prefecture, where it meets the Pacific Ocean in the city of Ishinomaki.

Historically, the Kitakami River was important for the transportation of goods by boat. The abundant reeds along its banks provide a natural habitat for a wide variety of waterfowl and have been used for centuries to make traditional thatched roofs. The river's freshwater clams, called shijimi, are harvested and typically used in a local variant of miso soup, and every autumn, the river hosts a spectacular salmon run.

Although the Kitakami-ohashi Bridge is the only place where the Michinoku Coastal Trail and the Kitakami River cross paths, this mighty river is an intrinsic part of life in the region.



## ⑥ Okawa Elementary School

Okawa Elementary School in the village of Kamaya is one of the most poignant and sobering monuments to the lives lost in the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami on March 11, 2011. On that fateful day, 74 of the school's 108 students and all but one of its 11 teachers lost their lives when the tsunami's massive waves rushed up the Kitakami River and destroyed the school.

To convey the magnitude of the disaster, the wreckage of the school has been preserved, and the grounds—now covered in green grass and dotted with wildflowers—are open to visitors. Informative exhibits have been installed throughout the premises, including photographs of the school before the quake and in its immediate aftermath. Perhaps the most moving feature is the Angel of Hope, a statue that stands in front of the school as a testament to the community's resilience and strength as it looks to the future.

## ⑦ Moriumius Lusail

(Map title: MORIUMIUS LUSAIL)

Moriumius Lusail is an educational center in the woods of Ogatsu where children can learn about sustainability and living in harmony with nature. The first part of the center's name is a combination of words: mori means "forest," umi means "ocean," and us is a play on asu, or "tomorrow." The second part, Lusail, is from the Qatari city of the same name, since the center was built with the support of the

Qatar Friendship Fund.

Moriumius opened in 2015, giving new life to the disused buildings of Kuwahama Elementary School, which closed in 2002. The wooden buildings are almost 100 years old and feature roofs made from Ogatsu slate, a local stone that is also used to make high-quality inkstones. The airy, open interior is the result of a redesign by renowned Japanese architects Kengo Kuma and Takaharu Tezuka, in collaboration with architecture students from Stanford University.

The center has separate dorms for boys and girls, as well as open-air baths, an outdoor kitchen, a dining room, and a pond alongside two small rice fields.

Shuttle buses to Moriumius operate on Saturdays from both Sendai Station and Sendai International Airport. Visitors are encouraged to explore the space freely, and volunteers are always welcome.

## ⑧ Shirogane-jinja Shrine

Established in the Nara period (710-794), this shrine on Cape Shiroganezaki is regarded as a “power spot,” a place of great natural beauty that has rejuvenating and energizing effects. The dense forest surrounding the road to the shrine was once a deer-hunting ground for the Date family, the daimyo lords who ruled the area in early modern times. A moss-covered stone torii gate marks the boundary between the woods and the shrine grounds, and old stone lanterns adorned with deer motifs line the trail leading up to the main structure. It is forbidden to take as much as a pebble from these sacred grounds.



Visitors are permitted to enter the shrine’s main building, which has been reconstructed twice over the centuries. Inside the vermilion walls are works of traditional Japanese art thought to date back to the Edo period (1603–1868). The hiking trail continues past the main building to a lighthouse overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The lighthouse is off limits to visitors, but from the promontory, on clear days, the sacred island of Kinkasan is visible in the distance.

## ⑨ Hayama-jinja Shrine and Isono-jinja Shrine

Hayama-jinja Shrine and Isono-jinja Shrine are two sacred sites on Mt. Ishimine that share a long history. Hayama-jinja Shrine was established in the Muromachi period (1392–1573) and received patronage from Date Masamune (1567–1636), the erudite head of the Date family who ruled the region. The shrine is known for its Ogatsu Hoin Kagura, a local tradition of music and dance performed to entertain the gods (kagura) that is characterized by ornate masks and elaborate costumes. Ogatsu Hoin Kagura has been designated an



Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property. Although the shrine was badly damaged by the tsunami in 2011, it was completely rebuilt by 2019.

Isono-jinja Shrine, established in the Nara period (710–794), lies deeper within the cedar forest at the summit of Mt. Ishimine, about a 40-minute hike from Hayama-jinja Shrine. For centuries, ascetics have made the journey to the mountaintop to worship at Isono-jinja Shrine's most sacred feature, a large boulder about 7 meters tall and 3 meters wide whose shape resembles an eboshi, a type of cap worn by aristocrats in the Heian period (794-1185). The shrine is dedicated to a deity who protects travelers.

## ⑩ Central Ogatsu and Ogatsu Tanakoya Mall

(Map title: Central Ogatsu Area (opens in 2019))

In 2011, the small town of Ogatsu was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. Since then, however, the town's strong sense of community has seen it through formidable hardships and into a period of regrowth and reinvigation.

The Ogatsu Tanakoya Mall is at the heart of the community, a shopping center where locals and visitors can enjoy home-style meals

prepared from fresh, local ingredients or pick up one of the high-quality, handcrafted inkstones that Ogatsu is renowned for. The Ogatsu Center provides information about the earthquake and how the town's reconstruction is progressing. Other highlights along this section of the Michinoku Coastal Trail include the Ogatsu Rose Factory Garden and the reconstructed Hayama-jinja Shrine.



## ⑪ Ogatsu Rose Factory Garden

The Ogatsu Rose Factory Garden is a symbol of hope and community. In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami that struck the area in 2011, residents came together here to plant flowers in memory of the people who lost their lives in the disaster. Thanks to the efforts of hundreds of volunteers, the almost 2,000-square-meter site now teems with life, including not only a rich diversity of roses but also cherry and plum trees, blueberries, strawberries, cherries, and wild herbs.



The freshly picked fruits and herbs are used in drinks and food sold at the café on the premises. The facility hosts a range of activities throughout the year, from seminars on disaster preparedness to concerts, workshops, and children's field trips.

## Nagatsura Lagoon

Located not far from the mouth of the Kitakami River, Nagatsura Lagoon is connected to the Pacific Ocean. Surrounded by forests and mountains, this nutrient-rich body of water is an excellent habitat for a wide variety of marine life and is used for commercial fishing. The catch includes oysters, eels, and sea bass, which enter the lagoon to feed on small fish and roe. The lagoon was adversely affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011, but the community has since worked to restore the natural habitat. A forest path connects the lagoon to the Hibuse Stone Monuments.



## Obandaira

Obandaira refers to the grassland atop a forest-covered mountain range on the Tokura Peninsula. Rising to 386 meters above sea level, Obandaira is the perfect place along the Michinoku Coastal Trail to test your hiking legs. The trail starts a short distance from the Ishinomaki Riverside Visitor Center and winds through shading Japanese fir and beech trees. The area is home to a wide variety of fauna, including the endangered Japanese golden eagle.



Upon arrival, Obandaira offers a panoramic view of Shizugawa, Oppa Bay, Nagatsura Lagoon, and even sacred Kinkasan Island in the distance. In summer, Obandaira is used as a pasture for local dairy cows.

## Hibuse Stone Monuments



These stone monuments stand on either side of the harbor in Naburi Bay. Comprised of three large stones each, they were erected to ward off fires after a great blaze broke out in 1781. The Japanese word *hibuse* means “fire prevention.”

Another result of the 1781 fire is an annual celebration held on January 24th called the Hibuse

Festival, which has been designated an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property. The event is partly a solemn reminder to remain vigilant against potential disasters but also a chance to have some fun. There are performances of bawdy, improvised skits called *ometsuki*, along with a colorful parade of large floats. Following the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011, the festival has become even more significant to the local community as a symbol of recovery.

## Arahama Beach

Arahama Beach is one of many swimming areas along the Michinoku Coastal Trail. Its white sand and protected location make it ideal for recreation.

The beach facilities were destroyed during the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, but a breakwater has since been built to prevent future damage. There is also a new beachside clubhouse, equipped with all the amenities beachgoers need to have fun in the sun. Another local point of interest is the island just offshore, Yoroijima, where ichthyosaur fossils were unearthed.



The beach is scheduled to reopen for the 2020 swimming season.

## Namiita Lab Community Center and Boat House Namiita



The Namiita Lab Community Center, constructed using local materials and applying the principles of universal design, won a Good Design Award in 2016. Equipped with spacious meeting rooms, restrooms, a shower and bath, a fully furnished kitchen, and bedrooms, the facility can be reserved for events or as lodging for hikers. The center also runs workshops at which local artisans teach participants how to make traditional Ogatsu slate crafts. Slate is used to make the elegant hand-carved inkstones for which the area is known—which are sold at the center—as well as roofing tiles and even tableware.

Near the shore just down the road is Boat House Namiita, which includes an exhibit of a small boat named the Daini Katsumaru. Like many buildings and boats in Ogatsu, the Daini Katsumaru was washed away by the 2011 tsunami. But in 2015, after being missing for over 1,500 days, it was found off the coast of Hawaii and returned to Ogatsu. It is now the centerpiece of a display detailing its incredible 6,000-kilometer journey, a heartwarming tale of hope in the aftermath of disaster.

## Cape Osuzaki Lighthouse



Constructed in 1949, the Cape Osuzaki Lighthouse overlooks the fishing harbor of the small town of Osu on the Ogatsu Peninsula. Although only a modest 12 meters tall, the lighthouse has weathered many storms and was undamaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011.

A symbol of hope to fishermen and locals alike, in 2018 this lighthouse became the first in Miyagi Prefecture to be included in the Love Lighthouse Project, a joint initiative by the Nippon Foundation, Nippon Romanticist Association and other organizations to preserve and promote the romance of lighthouses throughout the country. The lighthouse is surrounded by a tranquil garden, and the photogenic, heart-shaped marina below makes it a particularly romantic spot. When the weather is clear, there is a fine view of the islands dotting the surrounding sea, including the sacred island of Kinkasan.