

Forest Therapy Base [Okutama Giant Trees Healing Forest]

Okutama Town is located at the northwest corner of the Tokyo metropolitan area. The whole area is a vast forest belonging to the Chichibu Tama Kai National Park, and the town is blessed with numerous valleys. Also, according to a survey conducted by the Ministry of the Environment, over 1,000 giant trees have been counted, making it the town with the largest number of giant trees in Japan.

The forest therapy base in Okutama, which is the first of its kind in Tokyo, offers five therapy roads that can be enjoyed: the Okutama Lake Relaxing Road, the Okutama Old Road, the Fragrance Road "Toke-Trail", the Hatonosu Valley Hiking Trail, and the Hyakuhito Waterfalls Mountain Trail. Moreover, access from the city is quite convenient, so it is easy to visit.



What is Forest Therapy?

When you step into the forest you can smell the fragrance of trees and earth. You can feel and breathe the life and power coming from the green all around. And that relaxing power heals us.

The healing effects of forests have become popularly known as *forest bathing*. However, the actual effects of forest bathing were thought to be only a matter of subjective feeling. Here, *forest therapy* goes a step beyond forest bathing by scientifically elucidating its beneficial effects, and making use of them for improving mind and physical health. Okutama Town offers visitors a variety of forest therapy programs aimed at relaxation and developing a healthier life through its forest therapy base *Okutama Giant Trees Healing Forest*.



Results Obtained in Experiments

Physiological, psychological and physical experiments conducted in urban and forest areas show that the concentration of cortisol, the stress hormone found in saliva, is lower in forests than in urban areas. In addition, it has been found that fluctuations in heartbeat, which rise when the individual is under high stress, are suppressed in the forest. The same effect can be seen in the activity of the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which calms down and relaxes in forest areas.

Furthermore, regarding immune functions, research shows that phytoncides from forest and forest bathing increases NK activity (natural killer activity). This has been reported by Dr. Qing Li who is affiliated to Nippon Medical School Research Team. (* NK activity: immunological activity effective for suppressing cancer)

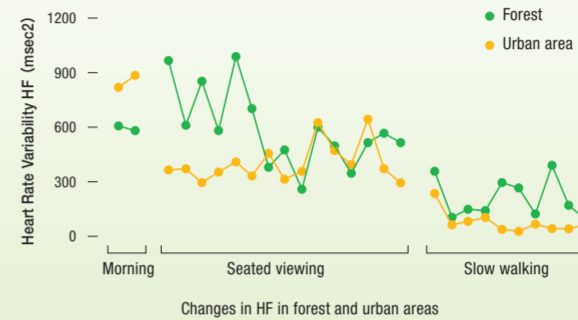
Phytoncide

The beneficial effects of forest bathing are brought about by the scent of the woods called "phytoncide". Phytoncide comes from trees and grass and is a volatile substance forest plants produce and emanate themselves, and the main components are organic compounds called terpenes. Phytoncides do not only refresh the body but also have various functions such as antibacterial, insecticidal, deodorant, etc. Their proper use can make our life healthier and more prosperous.



Heart Rate Variability (HRV)

It was shown that parasympathetic activity was dominant, and the body was in a relaxed state in forest areas.

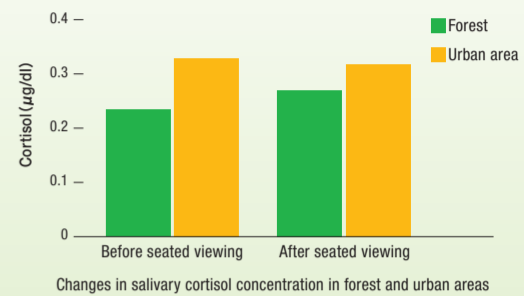


Why forests are good for the body

For most of human history people lived in close contact with nature. However, the world today has become mainly urban, and life in an artificial environment is stressful in many ways. For us humans who have lived in nature, entering into the forest means to place ourselves in a suitable, gentle environment. When we consider this, it is just natural that forest bathing is relaxing, and that scientific effects such as raising the body's immune power lowering blood pressure are observed.

Salivary Cortisol Concentration

The graph shows that salivary cortisol concentration is lower in the forest, and it became clear that forest environments have a stress mitigation effect.



Forest Therapy Activities

Guide Walk

An Okutama Town Forest Therapy Assistant Certified Guide will support your forest walk. Unlike a nature guide, the assistant not only gives information but also cherishes what visitors look for and guides them in the forest. You can enjoy "Tea time in the Forest" with delicious herb tea on the way.



Nordic Walk

A type of fitness exercise in which you use two poles when walking. Originally utilized by Nordic sky athletes, it has high exercise efficiency. The effective use of both arms becomes a driving force; the stride is larger than in ordinary walking, and the walking speed also rises. Since we will give a short course explaining the basics from how to hold a pole, beginners can easily enjoy it. The exercise while walking in the forest is refreshing. It is recommended for those who want to enjoy the forest a little more actively.



Making Soba Noodles

You can experience making soba noodles using soba flour from Okutama. Of course, you can eat the soba you made on the spot. The taste of soba that one makes is special. (In the case that is not possible to provide soba flour from Okutama, we will provide flour of equal quality.)



Ceramics

You can fully taste the feel of the earth and make unique dishes and cups that will be one of a kind.



Hot Spring Bathing

There are four hot spring sources in the town. One of them is Moegi no Yu, a town-operated hot spring. From the outdoor bath you can see the clear stream of the Tama River and the mountains. By being surrounded by nature and relaxing at the hot spring, your body and mind will feel refreshed.



Aromatherapy Class

In the aroma class, you will make aroma oil with your favorite fragrance. An aroma therapist will also teach you how to do massage with aroma oil, so why not try using it for massage?



Forest Yoga

Yoga in the forest gives a sense of refreshment and freedom. Also, it is great for stress relief and improving concentration. The effects of yoga can be further enhanced by creating a sense of unity with the surrounding nature.

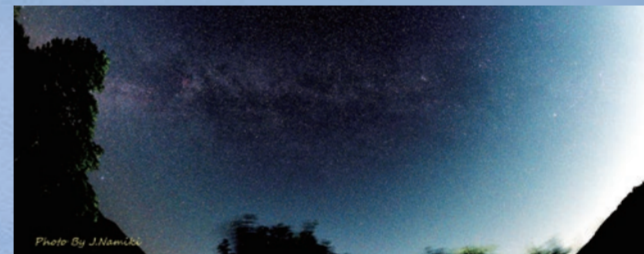


Wood Work

While feeling the warmth and aroma of trees, you can make bookshelves and accessory cases of your own design. You will be hooked and forget the passing of time.



Starry Sky Bathing



You might be surprised to find out that so many stars can be seen in the Tokyo sky. With its clear air, the Okutama sky is very beautiful. If you lie down on the bench of the Toke-Trail, the stars in the sky seem to fall down over you.

Local dishes and original herbal tea

You can eat in the certified inn "Yuyado" which uses local produce such as wasabi, shiitake mushrooms, wild vegetables and Okutama trout. A healthy Forest Therapy lunchbox using local produce is also popular. You can expect relaxation effects and health improvements from our original herbal tea blend. The tea can be enjoyed during the guided walk and we also sell it, so please feel free to contact us.

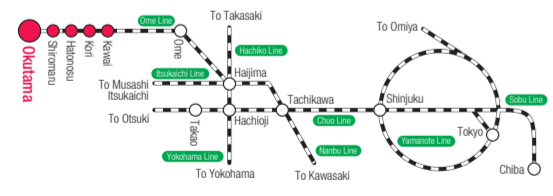


Tours include guidance in our special car from beginning to end.

Access Guide

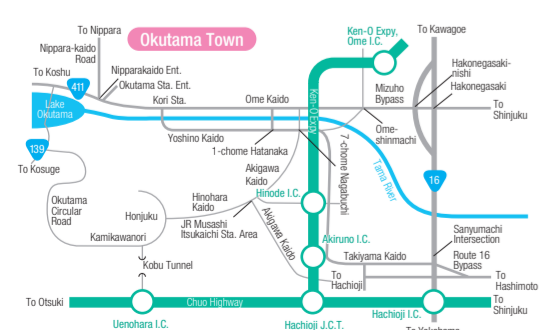
Access by Train

From Tokyo, Yokohama and Kawasaki districts, transfer to Ome Line at Tachikawa (approx. 1hr 10 min. to Okutama). Direct trains to Okutama Sta. are few, so transfer at Ome Sta. to the Okutama-bound train is usually necessary. However, on Saturdays and Sunday mornings direct service (no transfer necessary) is available via the Holiday Rapid Okutama/Akigawa train, outbound from Shinjuku (return train terminates at Tokyo station).



Access by Car

When traveling via Chuo Highway, change to Ken-O Expy via Hachioji Jct., exit at Hinode I.C., and change to Takiyama Kaido (R411). However, on Saturday and Sunday mornings congestion from Hachioji I.C. to Sagami I.C. can be severe, so taking Takiyama Kaido (R411) directly from Hachioji I.C. may be faster. When traveling from the direction of Saitama, exit Ken-O Expy at Ome I.C. and take Ome Kaido (R411) to Okutama.



Contact Us

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Okutama "fore-spiration" method.

The Okutama fore-spiration method is a breathing method for promoting health unique to the Okutama Town Forest Therapy, applying the *tanden* (abdomen) breathing method.

"fore-spiration" (forest+spiration): By consciously performing breathing in the forest, fore-spiration aims to promote health by actively ingesting compounds that come from trees such as phytoncides.



Place

We will do this in calm landscapes such as near big trees or near water flows in order to experience the negative ions coming from waterfalls and the phytoncides from the forest.

Clothing

Wear loose clothes that do not tighten your body.



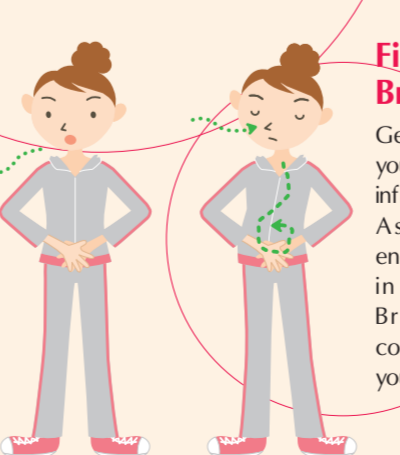
Locating the tanden

The *tanden* is about 3 cm under your navel.

Posture

Open feet slightly wider than shoulders. Bend slightly a few times and find a body position that feels relaxed. (This is to consciously feel the center of gravity.) Stretch the back muscles, release tension from the shoulders and abdomen, and relax the whole body. Overlap hands and place them lightly on your *tanden*. Looking at the front, tuck your chin in. Close your eyes lightly.

When you come used to this breathing method, slowly open your eyes and experience the nature all around.



First breathe out normally Breathe in

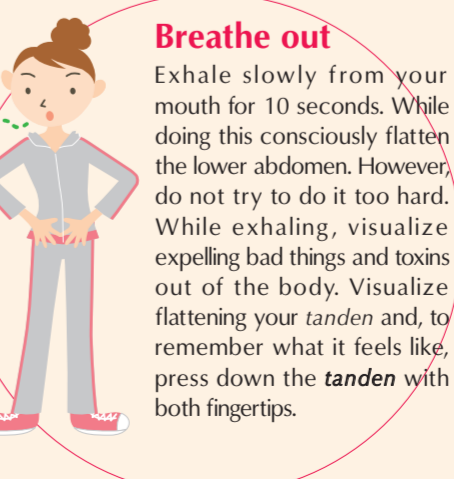
Gently breathe in through your nose for 7 seconds and inflate your lower abdomen. As you breathe in, the energy of the forest comes in and fills your body. Breathe in while being conscious of the swelling of your *tanden*.

Hold your breath

Hold your breath for 5 seconds. Drop down your breath into your *tanden*, visualize becoming one with the forest while greatly inflating the lower abdomen, and visualize the phytoncides that you inhaled spreading throughout the body.

Phytoncides are volatile organic compounds emanated from trees. They strengthen the immune system.

When you come used to this breathing method, slowly open your eyes and experience the nature all around.



Breathe out

Exhale slowly from your mouth for 10 seconds. While doing this consciously flatten the lower abdomen. However, do not try to do it too hard. While exhaling, visualize expelling bad things and toxins out of the body. Visualize flattening your *tanden* and, to remember what it feels like, press down the *tanden* with both fingertips.

Okutama Town, Tokyo
Forest Therapy Base

Okutama

Giant Trees Healing Forest



Forest Therapy

Okutama Lake Relaxing Road

The trail is about 12 km long, with an elevation change of 36 m. It is a flat trail along the lakeside with natural forest and mixed cedar and cypress. There is Yama-no-Furusato village at the end of the trail.

Trail Features

This is a flat course half way around the Okutama Lake. Placed in the center of a natural forest, a diversity of plants and small animals can be found in this good natural environment. Each season offers their own attraction such as fresh green and the red coloring of leaves.

Also, there are many benches, tables and toilets along the way, so you can take your time and relax. At the end point there is Yama-no-Furusato village, and you can experience making soba noodles, ceramics, and woodworking.



The road will remain closed during the winter season, from December 1st until the second Thursday of April.

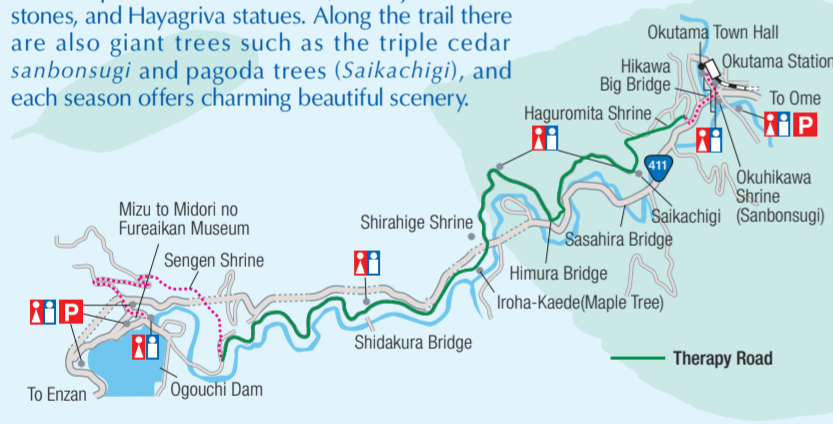


Okutama Old Road

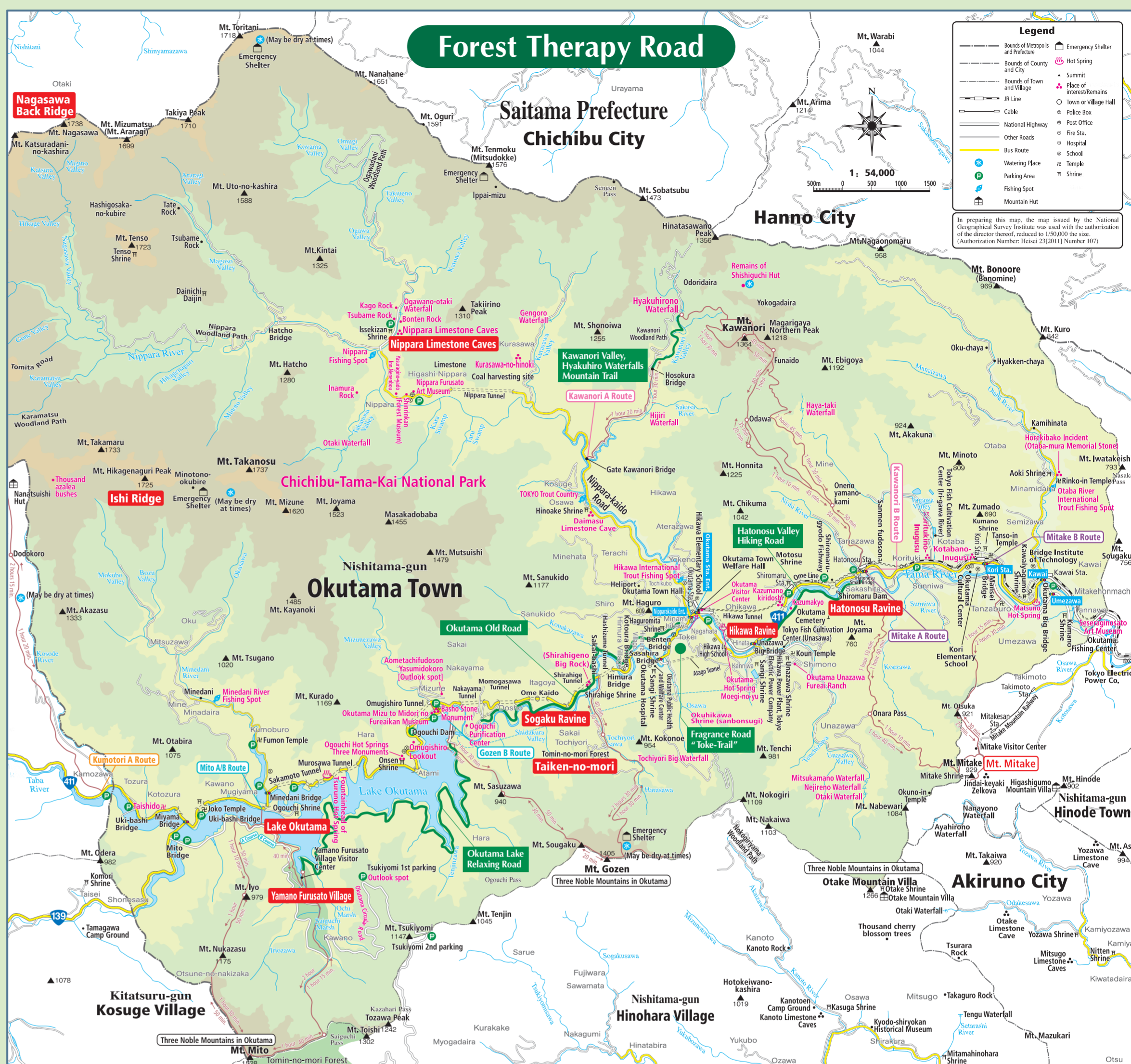
The trail is about 9km long, with an elevation change of 264 m. It is part of the old Koshu-Kaido Road and, in addition to giant trees and valleys, it is a trail with historical sites such as shrines and Dōsojin carved stones.

Trail Features

This old trail, connecting Edo and Koshu, goes from Okutama Station to Okutama Lake following the Okutama River. There is a bus route nearby the trail that makes the round trip 20 times a day, so depending on the time, it is easy to walk part of the trail only and then continue by bus. Because of the old road, there are many historical scenic spots such as shrines, Dōsojin carved stones, and Hayagriva statues. Along the trail there are also giant trees such as the triple cedar *sanbonsugi* and pagoda trees (*Saikachigi*), and each season offers charming beautiful scenery.



Forest Therapy Road



Fragrance Road “Toke-Trail”

The trail is about 1.3km in length, with an elevation change of 50m. It is 420m barrier-free, and is the first therapy-only trail nationwide. A wheelchair monorail is also installed.

Trail Features

It is Japan's first forest therapy trail, and can be easily accessed by walking 15 minutes from Okutama Station on the JR Ome Line. Inside the trail, facilities such as plazas are provided to enable a variety of activities including yoga, zazen, self-counseling, and hydrotherapy. In addition, there is a wheelchair monorail installed for people with physical disabilities.

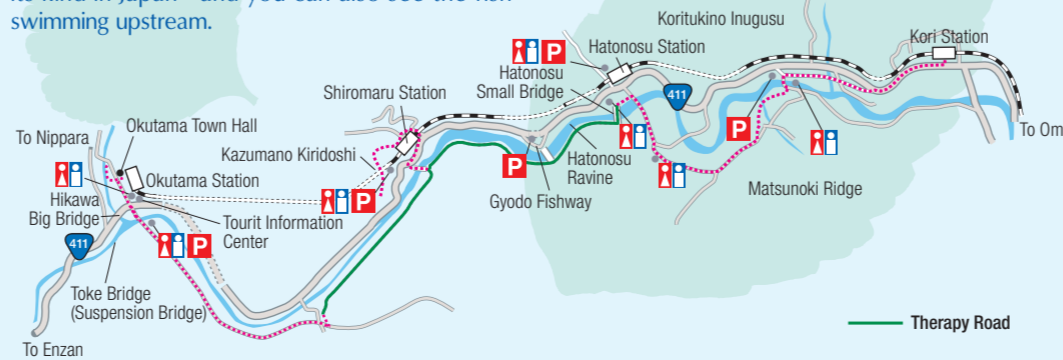


Hatonosu Valley Hiking Road

The trail is about 2.5 km long, with an elevation change of 68 m, and it goes along the valley following places such as Hatonosu Valley, Shiromaru Lake, and the Kazumakyo Bridge. The easy access from the station makes it an ideal trail to enjoy.

Trail Features

The trail goes along the Tamagawa River from the JR Ome Line Hatonosu St. through Shiromaru St. to the Unazawa District. Access from the station is very good, making it one of the most popular trails. There are many amazing places to see such as the Hatonosu Valley—the most beautiful valley of Okutama—, Lake Shiromaru and the Kazumakyo Bridge. On the way, near the Shiromaru Lake Dam site, there is a tunnel-type fishway—the largest of its kind in Japan—and you can also see the fish swimming upstream.



Kawanori Valley, Hyakuhiro Waterfalls Mountain Trail

This trail is about 1.8 km long, with an elevation change of 170 m, and it visits Hyakuhiro Waterfall, the most representative waterfall of Okutama.

Trail Features

Chosen among the one hundred water source forests in Japan, this is a mountain trail that goes along a stream to Hyakuhiro Waterfall, typical of Okutama. This trail is recommended for those who are confident in their physical fitness.

