

ASO CALDERA TOURISM GUIDE MAP

From Tokyo, Osaka or Nagoya,
fly to Kumamoto or Fukuoka Airports.
Then, take a local train, or bus to Aso.
Shinkansen passengers arrive at JR Hakata Station,
and change to local lines for Aso Station.



Flights from Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka
to Kumamoto

Tokyo	1:50	Kumamoto Airport
Nagoya	1:25	
Osaka	1:05	

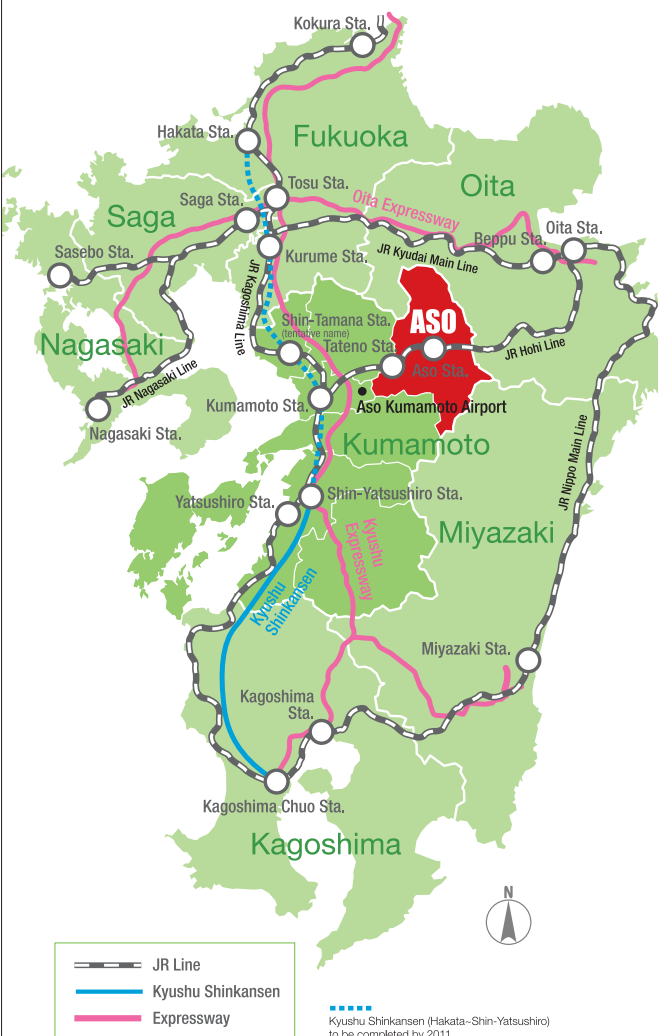
Trains from Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka and Fukuoka
to Aso

Tokyo	Shinkansen 5:40	JR Kagoshima Line Hakata Sta. (Fukuoka)	1:10	Kumamoto Sta.
Nagoya	Shinkansen 3:30			
Osaka	Shinkansen 2:30			
				JR Hoki Line 1:00-1:30
				Aso Sta.

Bus Route between from Aso Kumamoto Airport
to Aso Station

Aso Kumamoto Airport	0:50	Aso Sta.
----------------------	------	----------

Minimum travel times are displayed here.
Actual times might be longer.



Check!

Aso Caldera Tourism Website
"Aso TV"
<http://www.aso-tv.com>
Many high-quality videos depict Aso clearly.

In depth guide to the entire Aso area
"Aso Fan Club"
<http://www.asofan.net>

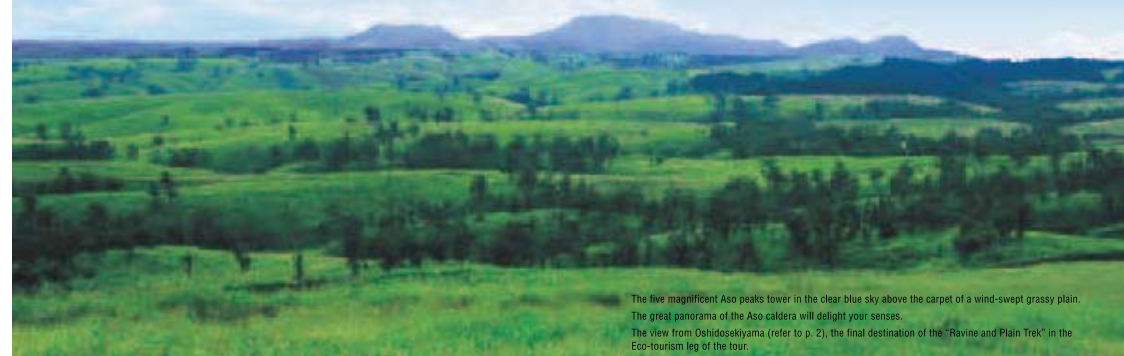
Aso area guide optimized for mobile phones
"Aso-navi"
<http://www.asonavi.jp>



Located in the southwest of Japan and the center of Kyushu, Aso has one of the largest volcanic craters in the world. Visit the Aso caldera for a new kind of travel experience!



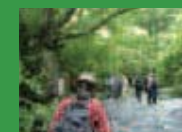
Aso Caldera Tourism



The five magnificent Aso peaks tower in the clear blue sky above the carpet of a wind-swept grassy plain.
The great panorama of the Aso caldera will delight your senses.
The view from Oshidosekiyama (refer to p. 2), the final destination of the "Ravine and Plain Trek" in the
Eco-tourism leg of the tour.

Aso Caldera Tourism offers a
unique traveling experience in which
visitors can take their time, relax,
and see Aso as it truly is.

The concept of Caldera Tourism incorporates three kinds of tourism: Eco-tourism, Green-tourism, and Town-tourism. Eco-tourism provides visitors with the opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors while in the company of a knowledgeable local guide. The Green-tourism experience lets visitors witness first-hand the daily lives of the people of Aso by visiting local farming villages and ranches. Finally, Town-tourism is where visitors can meet and interact with the people of Aso while strolling through the shopping district and town streets. Aso has many opportunities for wonderful encounters. It's not just sightseeing, but rather a chance to discover the real and lesser-known appeal of Aso. This is only possible thanks to the warm hospitality of the locals.



Eco
Tourism
P1-2



Green
Tourism
P3-4



Town
Tourism
P5-6

For more information
on tourism in Aso
contact:

Aso Design Center Foundation

Aso City Office, 2402 Miyaji Ichinomiya-machi, Aso City, Kumamoto

TEL 0967-22-4801 FAX 0967-22-4802

HP: <http://www.asodc.or.jp> E-mail: info@asodc.or.jp

ECO TOURISM

**ASO
CALDERA
TOURISM**
Eco-tourism

Breathe in Aso's fresh air and experience its dynamic nature. Let it nourish your soul!

Located in the southwest of Japan and in the center of Kyushu, Aso is known for having one of the largest volcanic craters in the world (photo right). It is surrounded by a ring of mountains about 130 kilometers in circumference and consists of five main peaks: Takadake, Nakadake, Nekodake, Kishimadake, and Eboshidake.



At the center lies the active volcano, Nakadake. Visitors can witness up-close the undulating magma and listen to the volcanic rumbles. Spreading outward from this crater is a vast space inhabited by a rich diversity of flora and fauna. Sharing this land are the 70,000 people of Aso living in harmony with nature. Eco-tourism is the most dynamic type of Caldera Tourism. Visitors can enjoy the

flows 30,000 years ago, including four eruptions over the past 270,000 years. The scenery comes alive with vividness completely unlike anything you've seen before. Visitors will enjoy both Aso's physical beauty and be emotionally charged. Such discoveries and magical moments can be found with every step you take in Aso.

Eco-tourism is indispensable in discovering Aso's true appeal. You can go wherever your heart desires, whether it be bathing in a waterfall's spray from a gorge, or getting lost in brush taller than yourself. Experience the joy of the earth's heartbeat in both body and mind. Your encounters in Aso will remain etched in memory for years to come. Journey into Aso, and experience it as never before.

great outdoors on walks with expert guides. Volcanoes, grassy plains, forests, and rivers, in and around the caldera present a stunning stage for your trip. Local guides point out areas of interest while weaving history, culture, myth, and legend into their descriptions. This is where Stone Age men stood and witnessed eruptions of pyroclastic

Here's what you can experience at Aso:

Eco-tourism

ECO 1

The Nakadake Crater Trek

This three-hour trip in the central Aso area will take you to Sensui Gorge, Nakadake, Takadake, and Surasenigahama.



ECO 2

The Plains and Gorge Trek

This three-hour trek is centered on the outer ring of mountains to the north, and the Oguri area. The trip also includes the Maeno Valley and Oshidoshi.



ECO 3

The Bura Virgin Forest Trek

This three to five-hour trek has different courses between Mt. Jizo in the outer ring of mountains to the south and Mt. Komagashi.



ECO 4

Horse Trek

There are many horseback-riding facilities at Aso. The photo shows Yume Daichi Green Valley. The trek takes about four hours.



ECO 5

Other Sites of Interest

There are many other sites of interest including Go'oh-san no Sugi - a tree said to be a thousand years old (photo above), waterfalls, and parks with wildflowers and wellsprings.



eco guide

Member, Aso Nature Guide Committee
Eco-guide
Takao Takamura



The great outdoors and its many splendors make Aso a natural treasure chest as stunning as any in the world. I have been involved in the preservation of nature in Aso for about 40 years. As part of those activities I have been a guide, conveying to as many people as possible the splendor of nature at Aso. I want to share with everyone the nobility of nature and a sense of humility towards it. Even a short stroll will bring you into contact with the real Aso and its treasures such as the wild flowers, trees, clear streams, and animals. I hope we get a chance to chat while walking through the mountains and the rivers, and fully experience the area's many wonders.

ECO 1

A ropeway stretches from Sensui Gorge, famous for its roughly 50,000 Kyushu azaleas, to the eastern observation deck at the crater of Nakadake, 1,280 meters above sea level. Upon closer observation of the grassy plain below, one might notice the many craggy outcroppings of rock that jut between patches of grass. A trek at the Nakadake crater is like a visit to the Grand Canyon; however here you can experience the volcanic throbbing of the earth, rising smoke, and pulsing magma. The summit of Takadake, standing 1,552 meters high, is reached by steep volcanic rock-covered roads. Experience the energy of the land and let your imagination roam to the origins of the earth, nature, and life.



ECO 4

While it's enjoyable to walk on the grassy plains, why not treat yourself to a trek by horseback? The horses are splendid guides! Even those who have never ridden before can do so with peace of mind, as our qualified instructors will assist you. The view from horseback is great. Relax the reins, travel at a leisurely pace, and take occasional breaks. Coming in close contact with animals and the great outdoors is certainly one of the most appealing aspects of Aso.



ECO 3

Start from Mt. Jizo at the outer ring of peaks to the south. Pathway there, after passing through the grassy plain, you will find a natural tunnel created from the Japanese pieris shrub, which has white flowers in early summer. You'll begin to reach the Bura Virgin Forest at an altitude of about 1,000 meters. This forest, whose trees provide cool shade in the summer and a warm carpet of fallen leaves in the winter, is important for supporting life in the forest. Once you reach the area around Mt. Komagashi, fill your lungs with fresh air and proceed to the most difficult part of the journey where you'll find both mountains and valleys. Don't overlook the spectacular sight of the Japanese cedars that soar heavenward.

ECO 5

There are plenty of places where visitors can easily enjoy Aso's Eco-tourism without a guide. Go'oh-san no Sugi and the other large trees, which are Aso natural monuments, are worth a look. We also recommend you visit the large Isshingyo cherry tree in Minami Aso during the spring. It's 14 meters high and more than 400 years old. There is also a park at Kyusamura Minami Aso with more than 1,000 different plants, some of which are found only in this area. In the summer, you can cool off by bathing in the Shirakawa Suigen, the fountainhead for hot springs that is the pride of Minami Aso (page 4); or Nabegataki in Oguni, where you can step behind the falls for a unique view. Yet another way to get in touch with the real Aso!



ECO 2

Enter the Maeno Gorge by the outer ring of mountains to the north. The riverbed was created by flowing lava from an eruption 90,000 years ago. The water is shallow, coming up only to the ankles. Once you climb the spray-filled gorge while observing the large trees and alpine greenery on both sides, you'll come to Oshidoshi, a large rock formation on the grassy plain. Here you can see rocks with carvings on them made by prehistoric man. The scene from here facing the five Aso peaks (cover) is one of the finest in the area and is well known by local guides.





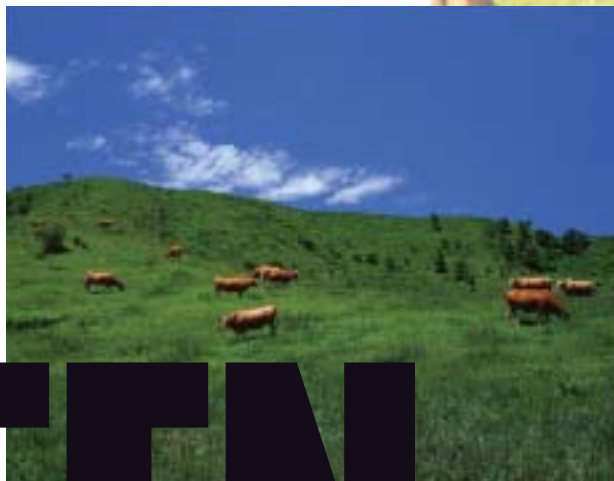
GREEN 3

Minamiaso-mura is known as a "fruit kingdom", with strawberries from December to May, and blueberries, grapes, and apples from summer to fall. In particular, there are many tourist farms in Shiramizu, located at the headwaters of the Shira River. Shira River is a Class 1 river near the Kumamoto Prefecture, famed for an abundance of water that pushes out at a rate of 60 tons per minute. Enjoy fresh hand-picked fruit, and savor for yourself the farm life experience. A ride by rented bicycle through the fruit orchards is highly recommended.



GREEN 1

In Aso, there are many places where visitors can discover for themselves what life in a farming village is like. Visitors traveling to Yoshitara Gombei Mura, located on a wide stretch of agricultural land, will have the opportunity to work on a farm. This site also has a campground and restaurants. Naka-no-Ka are a group of farming families who open their homes to visitors, giving them the chance to experience life in a farming village. The Sakouze-no-Kaeru is a farmhouse-style restaurant where the proprietors take pride in cooking authentic Aso-regional cuisine. The Mori-no-Eki Donguri is another farmhouse restaurant featuring local cuisine prepared with seasonal ingredients grown in the owner's garden.



GREEN 2

Wherever you go in Aso, you'll discover scenes that exemplify the area, including beautiful grassy plains that seem to stretch out endlessly, dotted with grazing red cows. In addition to milking cows, churning butter, and horseback riding, these ranches offer other delightful experiences such as the chance to savor local dairy products like soft ice cream and a variety of cheeses made with fresh milk.



GREEN 4

As with daily life in Aso, the meals of the area are filled with the abundant blessings of nature. Savor the local cuisine in each district, the fresh country air, and the breathtaking scenery. (left photos) Buffet courses of country cooking are available at the Ubuyama lodging house (serving 40 kinds of pickled vegetables), and Soyokaze Park in Yamato-cho. Aso is also well known for its regional production of soba (buckwheat noodles), using the crisp, clean mountain water of Aso as a key ingredient for fresh noodles. Visitors can sample dishes at several shops in The Soba Gaido in Minamiguni-machi. (upper photo) Try your hand at making soba noodles—it's fun!



GREEN TOURISM

ASO
CALDERA
TOURISM
Green Tourism

Green Tourism is a vacation experience where visitors can take part in the "slow life", endowed with the blessings of nature.

Experience Green Tourism in Aso!

Green Tourism



GREEN 1

The Farming Village Experience

Experience life in a farming village by visiting local Aso farmhouses, helping to harvest vegetables, eating at local restaurants, and staying in farmhouse lodges.



GREEN 2

The Ranch Experience

An array of different experiences await you at the many ranches spread throughout the Aso area, including milking cows, churning butter, and horseback riding.



GREEN 3

The Tourist Farm Experience

Experience life on a tourist farm as you enjoy picking seasonal fruits, including strawberries, apples, and grapes.



GREEN 4

The Country Cuisine Experience

Savor the rich flavors of Aso living, through its food. Both local and traditional specialties are prepared fresh daily.

As you travel around the Aso caldera, you will begin to notice many peaceful, rural scenes and the pastoral fields with red cattle and grazing horses. Kumamoto Prefecture, where Aso is partially located, is nationally known as the "land of fire", and famous for its bountiful water resources. Aso has been blessed with bountiful natural resources that has provided for the region's prosperity, both agriculturally and spiritually, for generations. This "Aso way of life" is still deeply ingrained in the minds of the people living here today. As testimony to this, customs such as the Fire Ritual of the Aso Shrine, that give thanks for abundant harvests can be enjoyed by visitors seasonally. The "way of life" of the people of Aso resemble the great legacy of ancient Aso culture carried on from generation to generation, and is one of the most appealing aspects of Aso. The intent of Green Tourism is to have visitors come in contact with Aso's true appeal by experiencing daily life here. The first thing



people must do to understand the intrinsic appeal of the area is to heed the proverb, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." First get a real sense of daily life in Aso by going to farming villages and ranches, trying your hand at harvesting crops, and milking cows. Hungry? Be sure to try some traditional meals and local cuisine. We hope you'll enjoy the "Aso-way of life" by participating in Aso's community; the essence of Green Tourism.

green guide
Asobo Ichigo-en
Green Guide Kimiko Goto



I want to share the blessings of nature and daily life of Aso with many people.

Besides the well-known Shirakawa headwaters, there are many tourist gardens in Minamiaso-mura. Our entire Aso-family shares the wish that you will enjoy Aso even more through the taste of our sweet berries. Our greatest enjoyment is hearing from tourists that they want to come again. Please come, eat your fill, and have a wonderful time!

TOWN TOURISM

Exciting encounters and a friendly town: A trip that will warm your heart!

The residents of Aso are deeply in love with the area. The Aso Caldera Tourism that we've described starts with the warm interaction between the local people who love their hometown, and the people who visit it. The concluding aspect of Town Tourism we'd like to describe here is based on this relationship between the tourists and the local people of Aso.



represents both the beginning of your journey, and the revival of your spirits. It is a refreshing experience, rejuvenating for both body and spirit. After your Town Tourism experience, slip into a hot spring and relax your tired body. You will be warmed from the inside out, filling your lungs with the fresh, clean air, and recalling all the pleasurable things you did in Aso. The smiles from the people you met and the pleasant conversations you shared with them will stay with you forever. We hope that you'll return to Aso and meet those people again!

Enjoying warm personal encounters with people as you stroll through the shopping and hot spring districts will offer the most inspiring experiences of your Aso trip. These interactions are the essence of Town Tourism. The shopping and hot spring districts are the favorites and the focus for most visitors. Relax and take your time, strolling through town looking for souvenirs at the many distinctive stores featuring famous products and local sweets. You can rely on tourist associations in each district to provide experienced guides that know the area like the back of their hand. You're sure to enjoy yourself as they greet you warm-heartedly with a cheerful smile, taking you anywhere your fancy pleases. If you visit without a guide, there's no need to worry. In Aso, you'll meet friendly locals on every street corner—in the Japanese inns where you stay, the confectionery shops you drop in on, or the people you pass by on the street. Enjoy your walk with peace of mind wherever you go. Through Town Tourism, you can sense the warmth of the people and that of the town itself. It is the most moving, warm-hearted portrait of Aso. Lastly, there's one more thing we should mention if you want to see the real Aso. As you know, Aso is overflowing with relaxing hot springs. The "Aso experience"

town guide

Proprietor, the former
Okinawa coffee shop, and
Hamaishi, serving local cuisine
Town Guide
Hirofumi Miyamoto



There are information centers everywhere you go in Aso. We're in the Monzen-cho shopping district waiting for your visit.

At the Monzen-cho shopping district just below the Aso Shrine in the center of the town, a group of young people have formed an organization to revitalize the community. This has resulted in an increase in original local products. Every merchant in the shopping district is happy to share their knowledge of the town with you. Don't hesitate to ask us any questions. We're always looking for new ideas to entice you back.

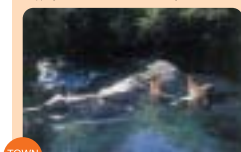
Town Tourism you can experience in Aso:

Town Tourism

TOWN
1

Monzen-cho Shopping District

After visiting the Aso Shrine, take a walk through the shopping district and visit all the refreshing fountains.



TOWN
2

Kurokawa Hot Springs District

This is one of the most popular hot spring districts in Japan. There's a wide selection of renowned local products, great food, and fine souvenirs.



TOWN
3

Tsuetsate Hot Springs District

A stroll through these back streets is like travelling back in time. Be sure to enjoy Tsuetsate's well-known steam baths.



TOWN
4

Uchinomaki Hot Springs District

Go with a friendly guide to experience dynamic scenery and history of the area, and enjoy delicious food and hot springs.



TOWN
5

Takamori Shopping District

After a stroll through the shopping district, savor the mouth-watering traditional cuisine at the dengaku restaurant, and delight in the exquisite views at the hot spring in Tsukimawari Park.

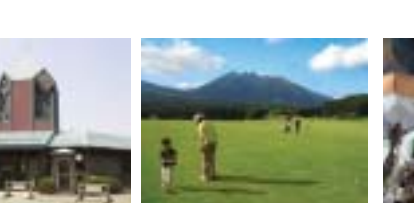
TOWN
2

When you first come to Kurokawa, be sure to head for Kaze-no-ya, the local information center for hot spring tourism. At Kaze-no-ya you will find helpful information about Kurokawa, as well as the opportunity to purchase vouchers allowing you to enter three different spas at a reduced price. These three spas, along with a popular local outdoor bath, are wonderful ways to discover the town of Kurokawa. As you walk down the street, you'll be impressed by the local atmosphere, with smoke rising from various hot spring establishments. Visitors can savor country-style cooking and well known desserts at fine restaurants in this quaint town. Tourists are especially recommended to stop by Sakura-dori and Igo-saka, lined with various shops selling



TOWN
4

Enjoy the guides' animated anecdotes about Uchinomaki. You'll hear about the best spots for viewing the five Aso peaks, the temples, and the hot spring facilities in the town. Sample the delights of shops selling manju, sake, and Japanese confections. Uchinomaki has an association of local people who serve as volunteer guides, and a simple reservation is all it takes to have them take you on a great tour through town. There are plenty of places to see, including the Jizo figure that is said to bring luck in the lottery, and the location where the movie Kosen was filmed. Aso is a town filled with so many pleasant attractions, you're certain to leave with many lasting memories.



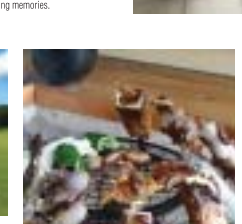
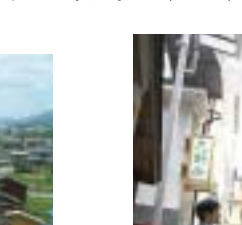
TOWN
5

In the summer, this is the best spot on the Minami Aso Railroad Tram. There are many sightseeing spots in Takamori-machi, including the Takamori-machi shopping district. If you take a walk around the shopping area near the station, you can sample the sake produced at old established breweries, or pizza offered with sakana (a spicy green pickled vegetable) as a topping. If you have time, stop by the gardens at Rakudayama Park for a break. We recommend the nearby restaurant which serves dengaku, a famous local cuisine of Takamori and Aso. If it's relaxation you're looking for, by all means try the Tsukimawari Park hot spring. The view at Tsukimawari was selected by local residents as the view they would most like to see preserved.



TOWN
1

The tour departs after a visit to the Aso Shinto Shrine, whose history dates back more than 2,200 years. Head north from the shrine to the Monzen-cho shopping district, where you will find 18 fountains spread throughout the town. These are called mizuaki, where anyone can drink the natural water for free. In such an easy and warm-hearted community, it goes without saying that the atmosphere is comfortable and unhurried. We hope you will try some of the famous dishes served here, including umaroke (horsemeat croquettes), inaka inari (rice-filled soybean pockets) served with a sauce for fried food melts in your mouth, and tanoshu (cream puffs with a thick dollop of cream inside). You owe it to yourself to take a stroll through the district while sampling its famous foods and mountain-fresh natural water. Please take a moment to talk to the sociable shopkeepers, who know all the local stories. You'll find the experience a fulfilling one, both gastronomically and emotionally.



TOWN
3

Tsuetsate Hot Springs is a famous spa in Aso that dates back more than 1,800 years. Its name derives from a Japanese expression that claims people who visit the Tsuetsate Hot Springs for relief from physical ailments will be cured. First, go to the tourist association and ask for a local volunteer guide. They'll take you on a walk through the back streets where you can still see how the baths looked years ago (left photo). Of course you'll get to visit all the highlights: the famed steam bath at Tsuetsate, the free mushigama, and the public foot-bath. (The photo below shows the area during the grand carp streamer festival in May that corresponds with Boys' Day.)

