

FEATURES

Towada Lake: A caldera lake formed by volcanic activity. Renowned worldwide for its rare double caldera.

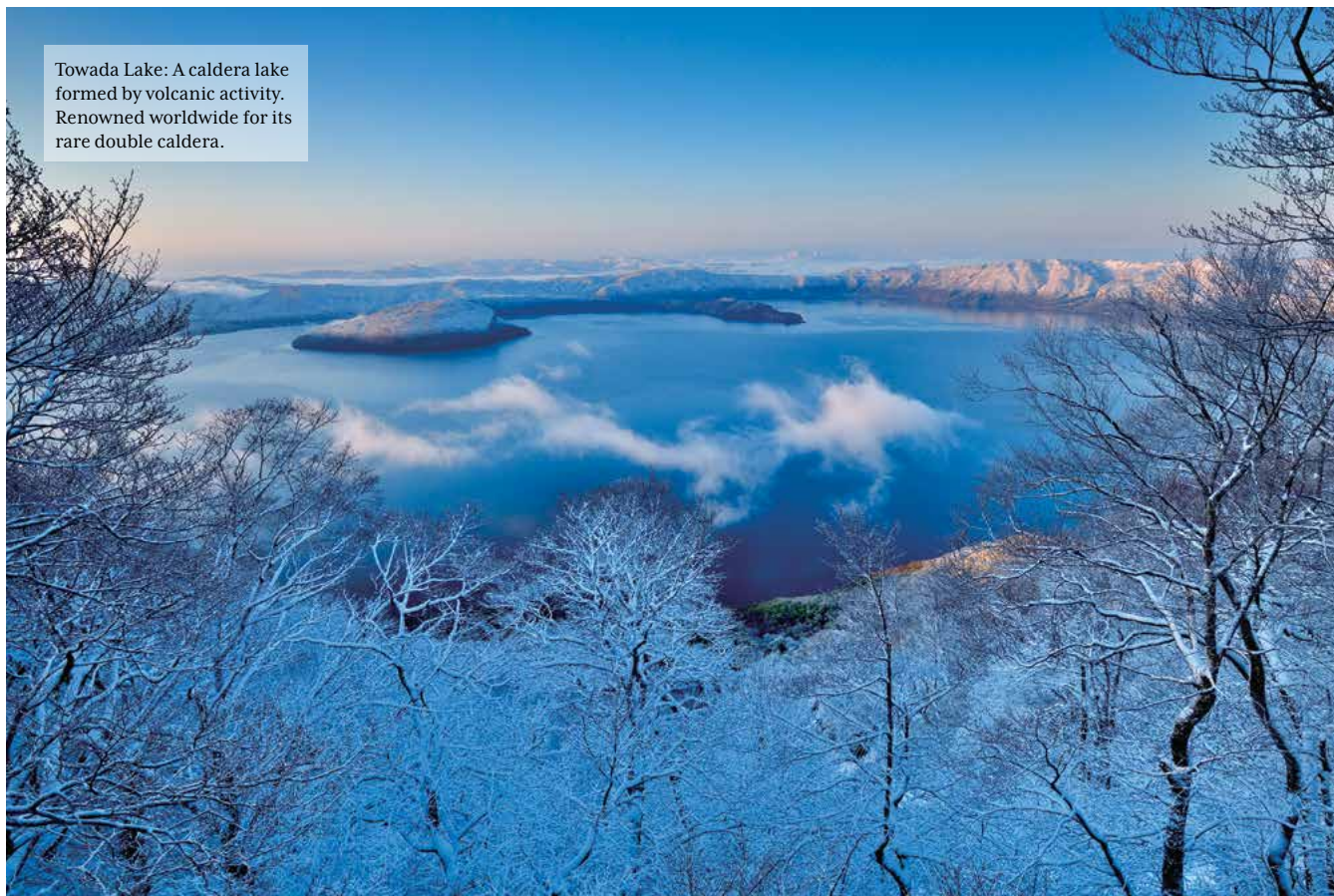


Photo: Nara Shuji, Winner of the 36th Lake Towada Four Seasons Photo Contest, Minister of the Environment Award

Experience Majestic Nature and Contemporary Art

In the Tohoku region of Japan's main island, Honshu, Aomori Prefecture sits at the very northern tip. Within its southern part lies Towada City. This distinctive locale marries the untouched beauty of its national park with the modernity of art, showcased by the Towada Art Center, drawing in international tourists. This article describes the appeal of this region and its efforts in museum-centric cultural tourism.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

Left: The Oirase Gorge, stretching approximately 14km from Lake Towada. Nestled deep within its diverse forest are a multitude of attractions such as waterfalls, pristine streams, and rocky formations.

Center: Aerial view of the Tsuta area in South Hakkoda with autumn foliage.

Right: The ice trees of Mount Hakkoda take on towering shapes during the harsh winter blizzards.





Left: Visitors are overwhelmed by the intricately crafted figures. On the right is the work “Standing Woman” (height: approximately 4 meters) by hyperrealist sculptor Ron Mueck. On the left is an actual person for comparison.

Below left: Opened in 2021, along with a new exhibition space, is Leandro Erlich’s “Edificio—Buenos Aires” (height: 7 meters).

Below right: “YOROSHIKU GIRL 2012” (height: approximately 10 meters), a large painting by Nara Yoshitomo, a native of Aomori Prefecture, adorns the building’s wall.



Photo: Oyemada Kuniya



Visitors are greeted by Choi Jeonghwa’s artwork “Flower Horse” (height: 5.5 meters). The street where the art museum is located represents Towada City’s historical connection with horses, coming from the facility’s past involvement in raising and supplying military horses.

Photo: Towada Art Center

In the western part of Towada City lies the Towada-Hachimantai National Park¹. This park boasts numerous breathtaking views, including Lake Towada, the Oirase Gorge known for its autumn foliage and ice cascades², and the ice trees of Mount Hakkoda³.

In the urban area of the eastern part of the city, a proactive effort to foster town development through art is underway, with the Towada Art Center at its core. Having opened its doors in 2008, the Center features a permanent exhibition of 43 works by 38 contemporary artists from both Japan and abroad (as of October 2023), with many of them being large-scale creations. Since these works are commissioned specifically for the Center, visiting here offers a unique opportunity to witness art that cannot be viewed elsewhere, enhancing its appeal.

Furthermore, the Center goes beyond preserving and displaying artworks. It operates with the concept of seamlessly integrating into the local community and mutually fostering growth, and this concept has become a reality. Shimoda Tatsuya from Towada Oirase Tourism Organization explains, “The structure allows visitors to appreciate the artworks from both inside and outside the building since works are also placed outdoors around the facility. As you stroll through the city, you’ll find yourself immersed in an ambiance that transforms the entire town into an art gallery.”

Additionally, efforts to accommodate foreign tourists are also progressing. “The proportion of overseas visitors coming to Towada City accounts for approximately 20% of all tourists. October, when attractions like the Oirase Gorge’s autumn foliage are at their peak, sees the highest number of travelers. Many tourists, I believe, enjoy both the art scene and Towada’s

natural beauty,” says Mr. Shimoda. Incidentally, the majority of international tourists come from East Asia such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea.

Tourist information tailored to visitors in multiple languages is readily available, with brochures, maps, and more provided in English, Traditional and Simplified Chinese, and Korean. In addition, tourist information centers are staffed with personnel fluent in English, Chinese, and Korean to ensure assistance for a wide range of inquiries.

Towada City is a captivating place where the forces of nature and human creativity come together, and where the beauty of both can be experienced firsthand. Towada City is one place that is not to be missed. **▼**



Above: Guide map of the Oirase Gorge in English

Middle: Leaflet for Towada Kohan Yasumiya in Chinese (Traditional)

Below: Sightseeing map of Towada City’s urban area featured in the Korean-language guidebook

Provided by: Towada Oirase Tourism Organization

1. Extending across Aomori, Iwate, and Akita Prefectures, the park is divided into two major regions: the Towada-Hakkoda region and the Hachimantai region. The park is characterized by its mountainous terrain, featuring captivating elements such as mountains, lakes, rivers, and numerous hot springs.
2. This term refers to frozen waterfalls. Waterfalls freeze when the flowing water comes into contact with cold external air. It’s a phenomenon that can be observed only in places where specific weather conditions are met. Furthermore, in the Oirase Gorge, ice columns can grow to sizes that closely resemble actual waterfalls.
3. This is the phenomenon where supercooled water droplets and snow, continuously transported by persistent winds in a single direction, freeze and cling to Aomori fir trees, gradually enveloping them entirely. Because of their distinctive appearance, resembling masses of ice and snow, they are often referred to as “snow monsters.” The best time to view them is in February.