

Hakone: A Major Sightseeing District Recognized Both Domestically and Internationally



Hakone refers to a district in the southwest of Kanagawa Prefecture centering on Lake Ashi, and Mount Hakone, which is an active volcano. The area is blessed with numerous hot springs and scenic spots and is also popular as a place for keeping vacation homes. Hakone can be reached in just under two hours from Tokyo and is popular among both domestic and foreign tourists.



1. Lake Ashi

Video: <https://youtu.be/d3DV0NGrisU>



Lake Ashi occupies the caldera of Mount Hakone. There are numerous resort facilities and sightseeing spots around the lake, which is also popular as a fishing spot where rainbow trout and other fish can be caught. Many sightseeing boats ply the lake, including pirate ships, and there are always many people enjoying the cruises and gazing at Mount Fuji in the distance.

2. Hakone Sekisho (Barrier Checkpoint)

Video: <https://youtu.be/GbFluAi-SHw>



Located on the site of one of the most important checkpoints in the Kanto region set up by the Edo shogunate (1603–1868), the Hakone Sekisho (Barrier Checkpoint) reproduces the facility as a

tourist attraction. Various scenes are recreated using mannequins, giving a very realistic picture of the time. Visitors from overseas show great interest as well.

3. Onshi-Hakone Park

Video: <https://youtu.be/ceilyMRDxmA>



Registered as a national monument, Onshi-Hakone Park is situated on the Togashima peninsula jutting into Lake Ashi. The park follows a hill rising from the large car park and stretches as far as the lake. When you climb to the top of the hill, you can view Lake Ashi and Mount Fuji. In good weather, you can spend a very refreshing time here indeed.

4. Hakone Shrine

Video: <https://youtu.be/jZ8g6juACR0>



Hakone Shrine was deeply revered by the Kamakura shogunate (1185–1333). Known as one of the leading “power spots” in the Kanto region, the shrine attracts visitors from all over. There is also a torii of the shrine, known as the “peace gate,” standing in the waters of Lake Ashi. Inscribed with the Japanese word for “peace,” the frame of the torii looks out over the lake. The mysterious sight of the red color reflected on the surface of the lake is very Japanese.

5. Hotel de Yama

Video: <https://youtu.be/y0yJ0hM6DyI>



Situated near Hakone Shrine is the Hotel de Yama, which is operated by Odakyu Resorts Co., Ltd. The hotel's garden is famous for its azaleas. Every May 3,000 blossoming azaleas adorn the garden with brilliant colors. If you are lucky, you will also be able to see Mount Fuji in the distance, creating a gorgeous and very Japanese spectacle.

6. Sengokuhara

Video: <https://youtu.be/XCo3L0IH9Zw>



Situated in the northwest of Hakone, Sengokuhara has bustling hot springs and vast roadside fields of beautiful pampas grass. There are also art galleries and museums in the area, so it is an ideal place to spend a day off.

7. Owakudani

Video: <https://youtu.be/iXRNHmwCv7c>



Owakudani, which is almost in the center of Hakone, is an area that was devastated when the Mount Hakone volcano collapsed. Known as the “fumarolic zone,” the area emits clouds of volcanic smoke and steam, and the smell of sulfur is pungent. The black eggs boiled in the hot-spring pond are popular. It is said that eating one such egg can extend your life by seven years!

8. Hakone Tozan Train

Video: <https://youtu.be/ylC2YQqtZsc>



Operated by Odakyu Electric Railway Co., Ltd., the Hakone Tozan Train consists of a railway from Odawara to Gora via Hakone-Yumoto and a cable car from Gora to Sounzan. One popular route is to take the Odakyu Romancecar limited express train from Shinjuku in Tokyo to Hakone-Yumoto and change to the Hakone Tozan Train at Hakone-Yumoto for Gora.

9. Gora Park

Video: <https://youtu.be/LjhHtqCLkGw>



Gora Park is a French-style landscape garden with a 100-year history. There is a beautiful fountain in the center, surrounded by a café, crafthouse, botanical garden, and various experiential studios and other facilities. The park is just a five-minute walk from Gora Station, so access is excellent. It is visited by many families with children.

10. Mount Fuji

Video: <https://youtu.be/J2l77IWNZVM>



As you travel around Hakone, you realize that every now and then the majestic figure of Mount Fuji looms in the distance. Like this moment when day breaks over the lake and the sun sinks behind the mountains. In the past people who visited this region no doubt watched out for Mount Fuji and enjoyed the active volcano of Mount Hakone.

Postscript

I traveled to Odawara on the Odakyu Line from Shinjuku and then rented a car to drive from Odawara to Hakone. Hakone is an expansive area with lots of sightseeing spots dotted around. It attracts many tourists from overseas as well. You can enjoy hot springs, diverse cuisine, and magnificent and exquisite scenery. Hakone is a place where you can spend a truly luxurious time.

Photos and text: Arata Matsumoto, Sharata and Advise, Inc. (<http://sharata.info/>)

(Sharata supplies 4K videos of outstanding scenery in Japan so that as many people as possible can enjoy it.)