
Hiking Mt. Rausu

Mt. Rausu (1,661 m) is the tallest peak in the Shiretoko mountain range, a series of volcanoes that run northeast to southwest through the middle of the Shiretoko Peninsula. Two trails lead to the summit of Mt. Rausu. Hikers reaching the peak on a clear day can view the surrounding mountain landscape and the Sea of Okhotsk.

The Shiretoko Peninsula is around the same latitude as southern Canada and central Mongolia, and as such, the mountain environment and weather conditions are harsh. At this latitude, hardy alpine plants like Japanese stone pines grow on the mountain at elevations of 1,100 meters. On Japan's main island of Honshu, such alpine vegetation usually only grows at elevations upwards of 2,000 meters.

The terrain is rugged and includes large rocks and steep gorges, and there is a sharp elevation change between the trailhead and summit (over 1,000 meters). A round-trip hike from the Rausu Onsen trailhead takes around 11 hours. Climbing Mt. Rausu is recommended only for experienced hikers.

Trailheads and the hiking season

The Rausu Onsen trailhead is adjacent to the Shiretoko Rausu Visitor Center, across from the Kuma no Yu outdoor hot spring. There is an alternative trailhead at Iwaobetsu hot spring in the Shari district on the peninsula's west coast. It is possible to begin at one trailhead and finish at the other, but there are limited public transport options for returning to Rausu from Iwaobetsu. The hiking season in Shiretoko runs from early July to mid-September. Hikers should note that snow remains on the mountain well into July.

Beware of the bears

Bears live in the Shiretoko mountains, including on Mt. Rausu. They tend to avoid humans and are sensitive to noise. Hikers should carry a bear bell to avoid encountering bears on the trails.