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Take a Hike.



While Yokohama is a very convenient city to live in, the landscape is predominantly artificial, with buildings more evident than trees in many areas. Where there are trees to relax under, they are mostly in neatly-kept parks. Sometimes the human spirit seeks refreshment in a more natural environment. Fortunately, the convenience of public transport connections in and around Yokohama means that residents can easily reach more natural environments in a short time. Some of the more easily reached areas for hiking close to Yokohama include the Kamakura area and places on the Miura Hantō.

Kamakura Area

Three well-known hikes through the hills surrounding Kamakura are the Daibutsu Hiking Course, the Gionyama Hiking Course and the Ten-en Hiking

Course. These trails are well-marked on the English-language Kamakura guide map available from the tourist information office at JR Kamakura station. (Japanese website: http://guide.city.kamakura.kanagawa.jp/haikingu/hiking_index.htm).

The Ten-en Hiking Course is the longest, at 5 km from behind Kenchōji temple to beside Zuisenji temple. After climbing a steep staircase behind Kenchōji up to the Hansōbō lookout, then scrambling further up rough stone steps, the gently undulating trail winds along leafy ridges past yagura (relic caves hewn out of the soft rock), a golf course and a couple of isolated chaya (tea shops), before dropping down behind the secluded Zuisenji. Walking through the woods, whether lush green or autumn tinted, city cares seem remote for a time.

Jimmuji to Oppama Hike

The top of the Miura Hantō is also hilly and wooded. Jimmuji station is near Zushi, half an hour's train trip from Yokohama on the Keikyū Shin-Zushi line. From the station, after turning left and walking for a few minutes beside suburban houses, the trail to Jimmuji temple first skirts a middle school (Zushi Chūgakkō) and a special care facility (Home Seseragi). After passing a collection of bonsai at the rear of the care facility, the mossy trail ascends under a green canopy beside a creek. Dragonflies can be seen along the creek and bird calls can be heard in the bushes beside the trail. The worn stone steps up to Jimmuji temple are evidence of the many people who have taken the path previously and passed under the temple's wooden gateways. The approach to the main hall is up stone steps guarded by a set of Jizō statues and through a once-red gateway. The few buildings are surrounded by trees and several wooden benches, which offer a pleasant place for a rest. Behind the main hall the trail winds further along rocky ridges, skirting

around electricity pylons, as it heads to Mt Takatori. It dips and climbs through leafy vegetation, crossing over twin tunnels of the route 16 highway along the way. At several places ropes and chains have been installed to help hikers safely clamber over steep rocks.

Eventually a substantially human-altered landscape is revealed. An old quarry is now used for rock-climbing. Atop the cliffs is an observation deck with 360° views of the area, including Yokohama's Landmark Tower, Tokyo Bay, Miura Hantō and even Mt Fuji in clear conditions. Another human-created landmark is also visible, and can be closely inspected by following the trail beyond the Takatoriyama Kōen park at the base of the old quarry: a relief carving of a Buddhist figure. Before long the trail ends in the suburban streets of Oppama. Heading down hill along an avenue of cherry trees at first, it takes another 25 minutes to reach the Keikyū Railway line to return to Yokohama.

This walk is similar to one covered in "Day Walks Near Tokyo" (revised edition 1992, Kodansha) by D'A. Walters, which ends at Keihin Taura station instead of Oppama. A Japanese leaflet showing the Oppama-Jimmuji route may be available at some Keikyū line stations. The hike takes around 2 hours minimum, but easily makes a pleasant longer outing with rest stops at Jimmuji and Takatoriyama Kōen.

Both trails described above require a modest level of fitness and sturdy shoes. Carrying drinking water is also advisable, as well as any food you may want to eat on the way.

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