

Kozushima Island: Tokyo's First Dark Sky Park

Around 180 kilometers south of central Tokyo lies the island of Kozushima, which was designated the city's first Dark Sky Park® in December 2020.

From the Takeshiba Passenger Ship Terminal in Tokyo, Kozushima can be reached in just under 4 hours by high-speed jet ferry or around 12 hours by an overnight large passenger ship. Part of the Izu Islands chain, Kozushima has a circumference of roughly 22 kilometers, an area of 18.58 square kilometers and a population of about 1,700.

Lots of fish are caught around the island, even compared to its neighbors, so the fishing industry is thriving. The highest catch is *kinmedai* (splendid alfonso), which can be enjoyed at local restaurants and inns.

The Tako Bay pier, located on the east side of the island, is a popular spot with visitors as Mt. Tenjo, the symbol of Kozushima, can be viewed from there.

At 572 meters tall, with various trail options, it is a beginner-friendly hike with lovely ocean views from the top.

The Island's Ancient Water Myth

Thanks to Mt. Tenjo, Kozushima gets plenty of water, as rain filters through its volcanic rock and earth layers, creating many sources of spring water across the island, including Tako Spring, located close to Tako Bay.

There is such an abundance of water on Kozushima that a myth called "The Legend of Water Sharing" has been passed down among the island residents.

According to legend, the gods of the Izu Islands gathered on Kozushima to discuss how to distribute water, the source of life. However, the meeting grew heated and the gods could not come to an agreement. They decided the water should be distributed the following morning on a first-come, first-served basis. The gods of Mikurajima, Nijima, Hachijojima, Miyakejima and Oshima arrived in that order and were given water for their islands, but the god of Toshima overslept and was late, arriving last. Furious that most of the water was gone, he jumped into

what was left and thrashed around. The water splashed all over Kozushima, which is said to be why so many springs exist today.

Darkness Engulfs the Island to Reveal a Sky Full of Stars

Thanks to its remote location and lack of light pollution, the island's night sky offers magnificent stargazing opportunities. In 2020, Kozushima was designated a Dark Sky Park (Dark Sky Island), an area certified by an international organization that strives to protect and preserve beautiful night skies untouched by light pollution.

All the residents of Kozushima work together to ensure that the night skies remain clear and beautiful. To reduce light pollution, they

switched the streetlights to only shine where light is needed. They also put effort into training local tour guides, so that island residents themselves could expertly explain the stars.

Since most of the island residents live close together in one village, light does not get scattered much at night, allowing the stars to shine brightly overhead.

Yotane Plaza provides particularly great dark-sky conditions and is where most of the stargazing tours take place. Located in an elevated area, it is undisturbed by the light from the streets and houses, and nearby Mt. Tenjo also blocks light from the neighboring islands of Shikinejima and Miyakejima.

On Kozushima, people can sometimes see a star called Canopus, which is rarely seen anywhere on Japan's mainland. Stargazers can also catch the Geminids meteor shower in December, find the Winter Triangle and enjoy unimpeded views of the heavens on clear nights.

Protecting the starry sky has also had the benefit of preserving the natural environment and fauna of the island. Switching to less bright streetlamps has

helped protect the darkness, which allows nature to return to its original rhythms. Locals say it has had a positive impact on wild animals, such as sea turtles laying eggs on the island for the first time in 10 years.

Thanks to unwavering community efforts, visitors and residents alike will be able to marvel at both the beauty of the cosmos and the island's diverse nature and creatures for generations to come.



Starry sky over Kozushima, designated a Dark Sky Park. Photo: courtesy of Kozushima Tourism Association



Mt. Tenjo is located in the middle of Kozushima. Flowers native to the Izu Islands can be found near the summit.



Akasaki Promenade, a famous tourist destination.