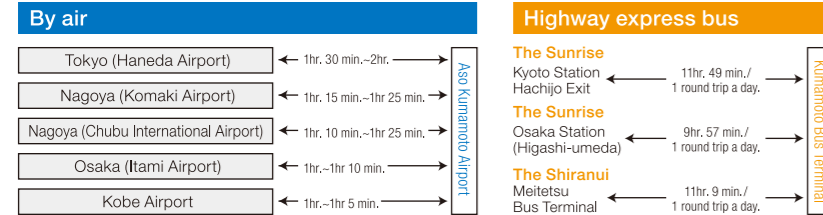
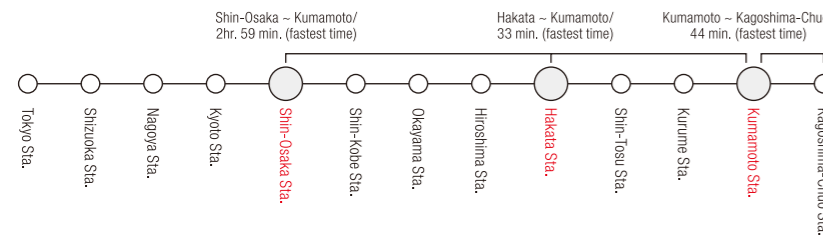


Access

Access to Aso Geopark from outside of Kyushu, Japan

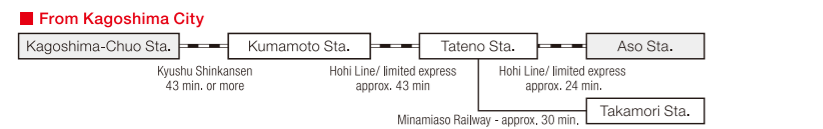
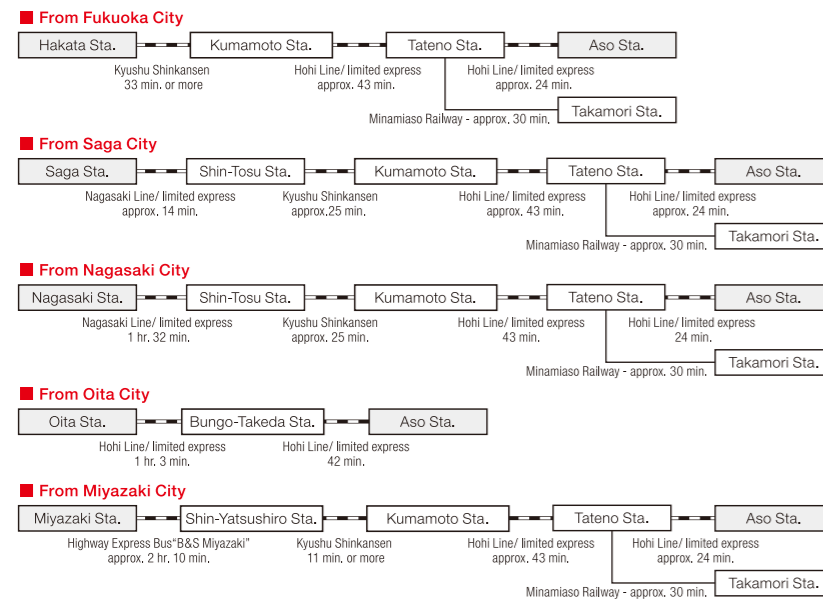


Shinkansen

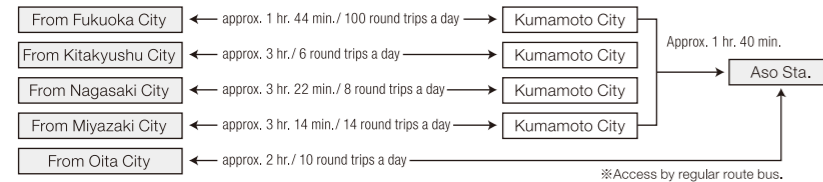


Access to Aso Geopark from each prefecture in Kyushu

Railway



Highway Express Bus

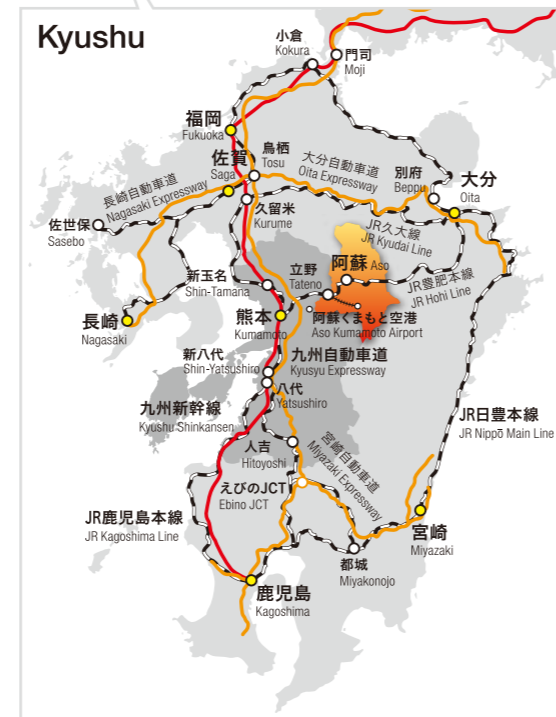


[Aso Geopark Promotion Council] Kumamoto Prefecture, Aso City, Minami-Oguni Town, Oguni Town, Ubuyama Village, Takamori Town, Minami-Aso Village, Nishihara Village, Yamato Town, Aso Eco Tourism Association, National Aso Youth Friendship Center, Aso Den'en Kukan Eco Museum Office, Aso Museum, Namino Plateau Yasuragi Recreation and Rest Center, Aso Nature Guide Association, Aso Tanibito Eco Museum, Aso Park Volunteers Association, Aso City Tourism Association, Minami-Oguni Town Tourism Association, Oguni Tourism Association, Ubuyama Village Tourism Association, Takamori Town Tourism Association, Minami-Aso Village Tourism Association, Yamato Town Tourism Association, Aso Volcano Museum, Kumamoto University, Aso Volcanological Laboratory Institute for Geothermal Sciences Graduate School of Science Kyoto University, Kumamoto Geosciences Association, Kumamoto Geotechnical Consultants Association, Aso Nature Conservation Group, Natural Parks Foundation Aso Branch, Aso Green Stock Foundation, Aso Design Center Foundation, Aso Junior Chamber of Commerce, Kumamoto 21, Japan Limonite Co., Ltd.

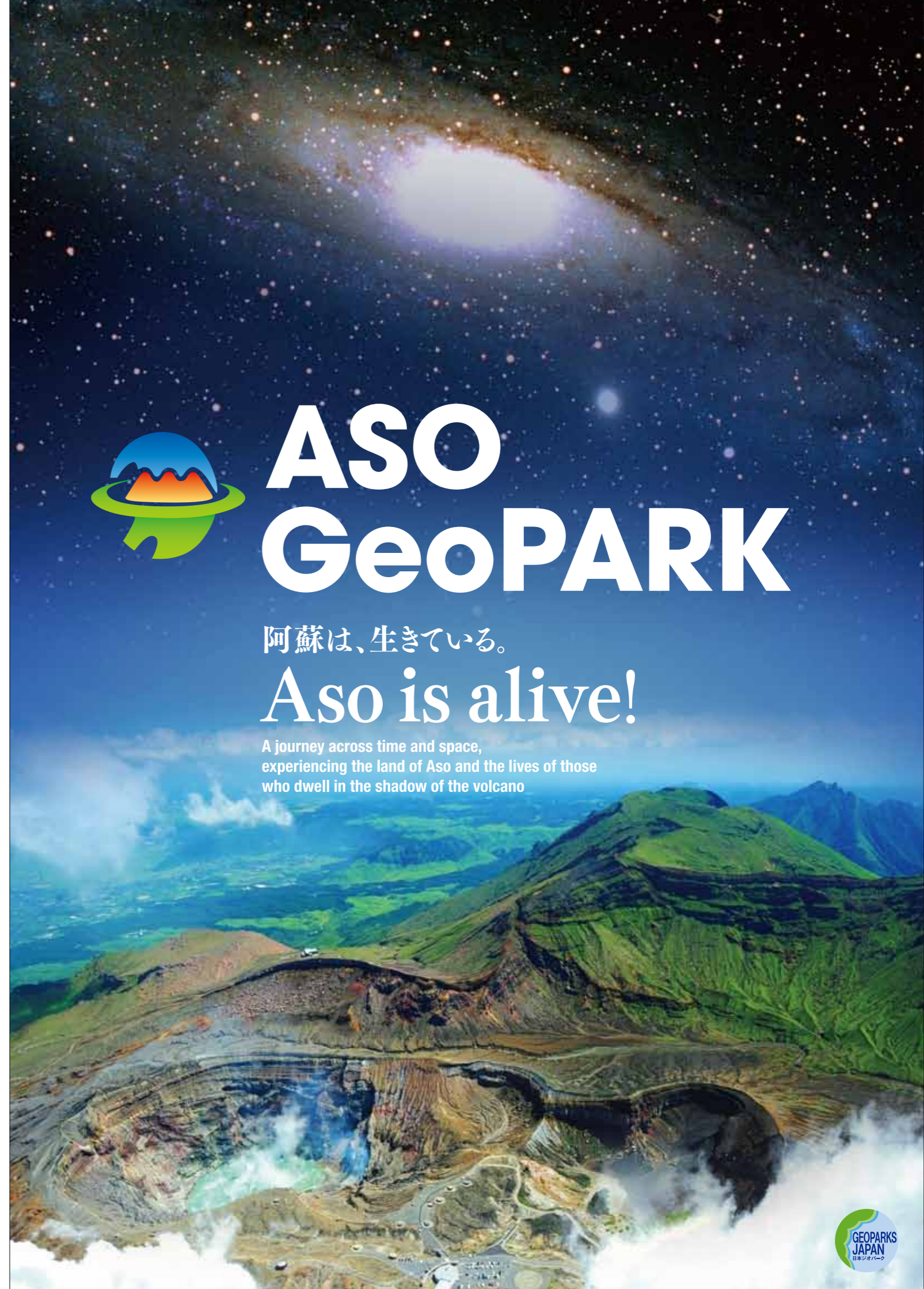
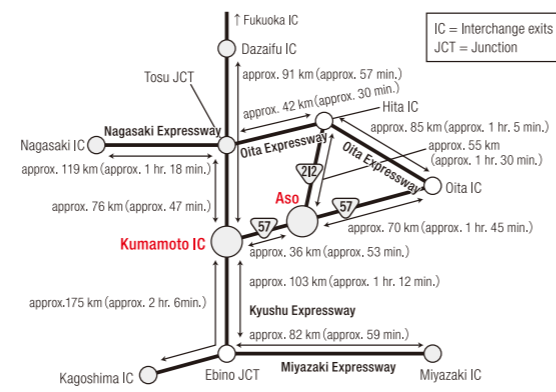
Aso Geopark Promotion Council

Aso Volcanic Museum 1F, 1930-1 Akamizu, Aso City, Kumamoto prefecture 869-2232, Japan TEL:0967-34-2089 FAX:0967-34-2090

Aso Geopark HP: <http://www.aso-geopark.jp/> E-mail: info@aso-geopark.jp



Car

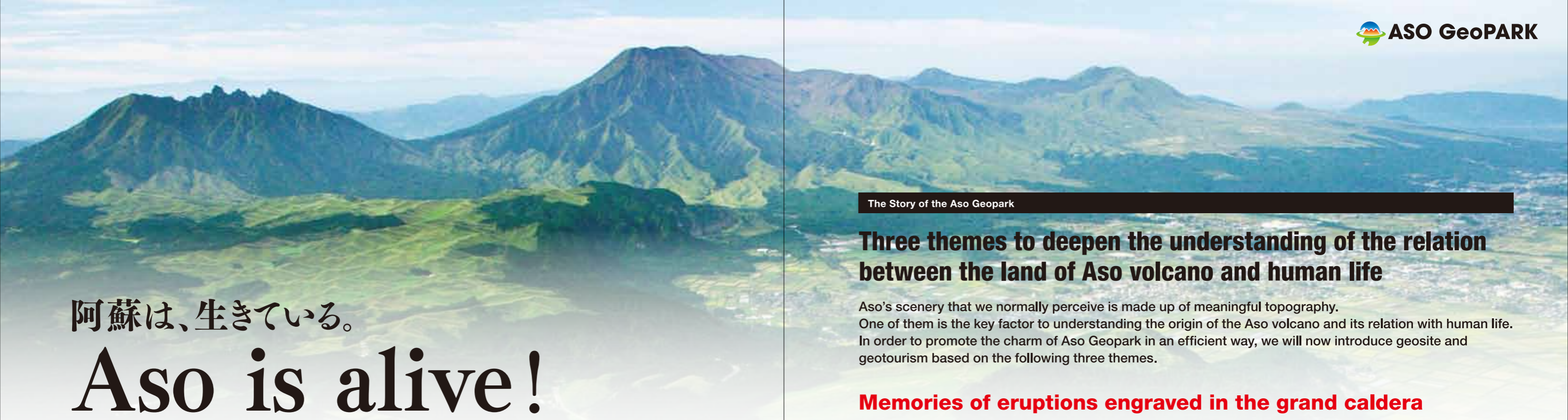


ASO GeOPARK

阿蘇は、生きている。
Aso is alive!

A journey across time and space,
 experiencing the land of Aso and the lives of those
 who dwell in the shadow of the volcano





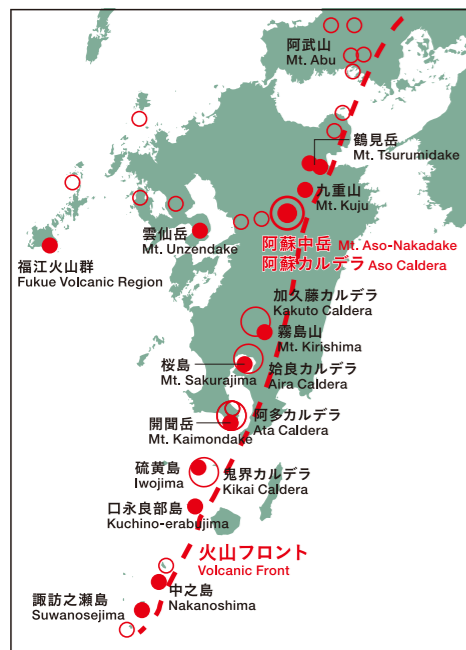
阿蘇は、生きている。

Aso is alive!

A journey across time and space, experiencing the land of Aso and the lives of those who dwell in the shadow of the volcano

The Charm of Aso Geopark

The Land of Aso Volcano and the Lives of Its People



The Aso Caldera is situated in central Kyushu, Japan. It is one of the largest calderas in the world, covering a total area of 350 km² and measuring 18 km east-west and 25 km north-south in width. In the caldera are the five peaks of Mt. Aso: Mt. Takadake, Mt. Neko-dake, Mt. Kijimadake, Mt. Eboshidake, and the still-fuming Mt. Nakadake. There also lie volcanic clusters consisting of various mountains. A plain spreads at the foot of the mountain range from north to south. Surrounding the plain and volcanic clusters, the outer rims form a gently-sloping pyroclastic plateau. This unique geography is formed by the Aso volcano, which has displayed repeated volcanic activities since approximately 270,000 years ago. The major theme of Aso Geopark is to enrich visitors understanding of the geological history of the Aso volcano and its relation to the lives of people: how they have enjoyed the bounties from the earth, engaged in their livelihood, and developed a unique culture and landscape.

Distribution of the Quaternary volcanos in Kyushu

Aso volcano is located at the cross section of the east-west volcano line which goes through Beppu ~ Mt. Yufudake & Mt. Tsurumidake ~ Kujū ~ Aso ~ Mt. Kinpo ~ Unzen and the north-south line which goes through Aso ~ Kirishima ~ Sakurajima ~ Mt. Kaimondake. This fact affected the structure of the Aso volcano and the complexity of its lithological structure.

What is the “Geopark”?

By observing the earth and nature scientifically, we define a place of scientific importance as a geopark, where many valuable and beautiful natural heritages exist such as strata, rocks, topography, volcano, and faults. A geopark values conservation and utilization of geological heritages. It is a place for people to become familiar with “geo” (the earth), learn about its history and mechanisms, think about its relation to ecology as well as human life through natural heritages including the culture of the people in the area. Geoparks are promoted around the world by the Global Geoparks Network (GGN), which was established in 2004 and is supported by UNESCO.

The Story of the Aso Geopark

Three themes to deepen the understanding of the relation between the land of Aso volcano and human life

Aso’s scenery that we normally perceive is made up of meaningful topography. One of them is the key factor to understanding the origin of the Aso volcano and its relation with human life. In order to promote the charm of Aso Geopark in an efficient way, we will now introduce geosite and geotourism based on the following three themes.

Memories of eruptions engraved in the grand caldera

The world-class caldera is the symbol of Aso Geopark. Unique land features and strata have been formed by considerable volcanic activities over the past 270,000 years and by a great eruption that occurred 90,000 years ago. Visitors will learn about such geographical information as well as influences of the eruption on various places in Japan through the geosites.



1. The world-class caldera and the formation of volcanic topology
2. The effect brought about by the extremely large volcanic eruption of about 90,000 years ago



Nakadake Crater: Feeling the breath of the earth

Among the volcanic clusters in the caldera, Nakadake Crater is highlighted because of its repeated and substantial volcanic activities from prehistoric times until the present. We will show you the unique landscape and ecology around Nakadake Crater, and the lives of people who live in symbiosis with the active volcano.



1. Volcanic activities which can be experienced nearby and the special scenery of the surrounding area
2. People living with the active volcano



Blessings of the volcanic mountain and people’s lives

People who live side by side with a volcano have explored ways to live in harmony with nature in awe of the volcano, and developed their own culture and lifestyle. And nature has brought them abundant blessings like spring water and hot springs which are commonly found in volcanic regions.

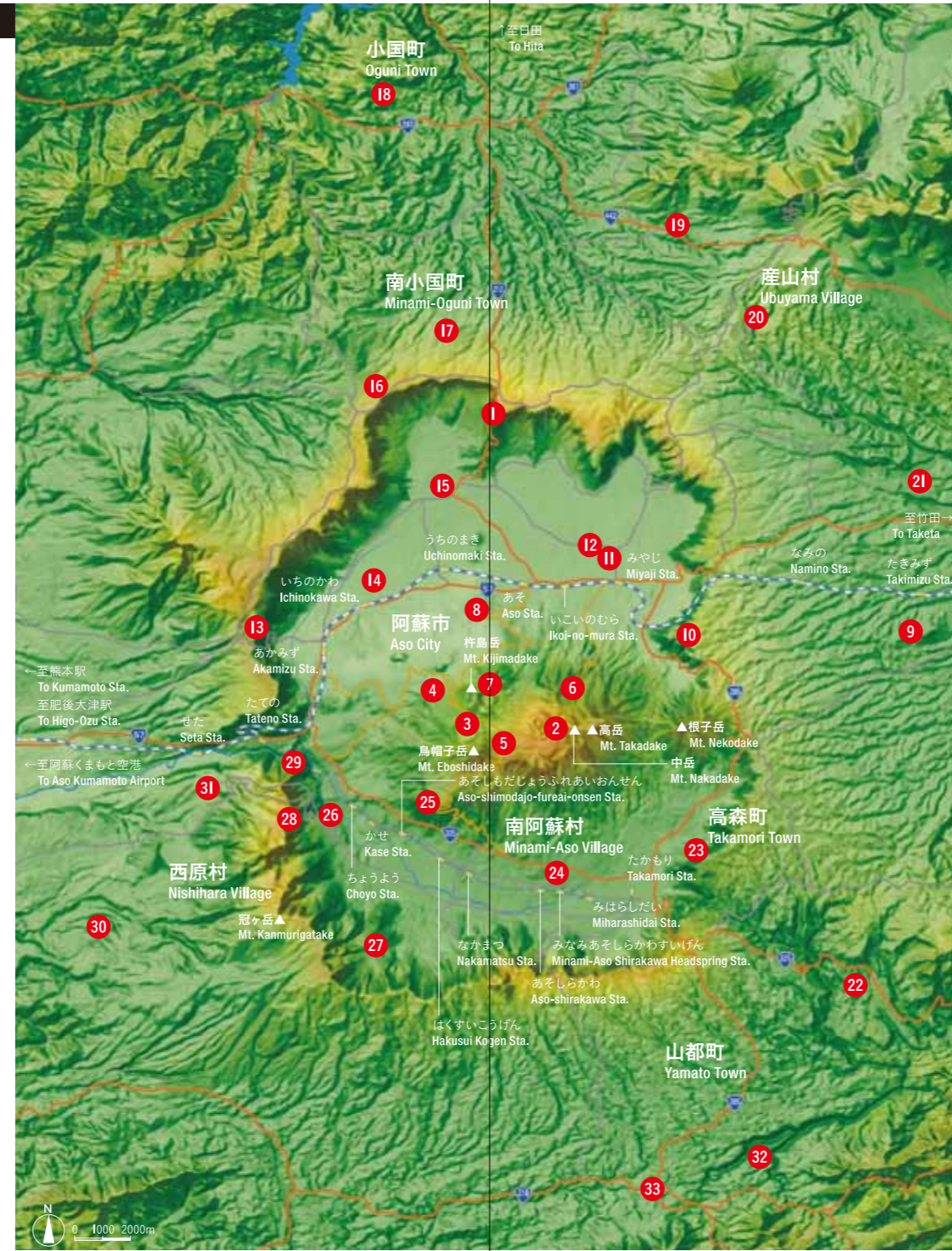


1. The blessings from the Aso Volcano
2. Deification of the Aso Volcano and the history of agricultural Shinto rituals
3. Harmonized life with volcanoes and landscapes nurtured and protected by people



Aso Geopark will take you on a journey of some 100,000 years of space time. Visit "Geosites" which introduce the overpoweringly attractive Aso Geopark!

Aso Geopark has many attractive geosites to help one more fully understand the various peculiarities of this area. It is a geosite to understand the formation of the land of Aso, and people's livelihoods will be introduced here.



1 Daikanbo Caldera Geosite

Observing one of the largest calderas, one can experience the memory of eruptions engraved on this land, and can appreciate the scale of the eruption which formed the caldera and its impact.



2 Nakadake Geosite

One can feel the activities of the earth closely through the repeated activities of volcano. The peculiar geography, geographic faults, as well as the culture of worshipping the volcanic activities can be understood.



3 Kusasenri Geosite

It is a crater of about 400 m in diameter which exists in a crater whose diameter is about 1 km formed about 30,000 years ago. Its peculiar topology as well as marshy vegetation growing on the periphery of the crater pond at the bottom of the crater can be observed.



4 Komezuka Geosite

It is a typical scoria cone formed about 2,000 years ago, which is relatively new among Aso's volcanoes. It is the most symmetrical one. A lava tunnel formed by a lava flow can be observed.



11 The Deity of the Volcano Geosite

Dedicated to Takeiwatatsuno-mikoto, the deity of Aso pathfinding, Aso Shrine is a spiritual center for residents of the area, along with Kokuzo Shrine and the Nakadori tumulus cluster. This site is very important to understand the beliefs of the people in Aso. Shimomiya Shrine, where the Hitaki shrine rituals (a sacred rite involving fire) is carried out, is also located in this site.



14 Aso Yellow Soil (Aso Odo) Geosite

Aso Yellow Soil (Aso Odo), which is distributed around Aso Gorge, is important to understand the function of hot water after the formation of the caldera. Ochre has been used to make bengala (red iron oxide) or used as iron ore and cattle feed since ancient times.



16 Milk Road Grassland Geosite

Vast grassland which extend in the north outer rim and volcanic ash soil (kuroboku, akaboku and akahoya volcanic ash) reveal the origin of the grassland.



17 Oshito-ishi Geosite

A group of andesite megaliths located on a hill 845 m above sea level. The biggest stone has a pyramid shape with a height of 5.5 m and a circumference of 15.3 m. It is said to have been used as a sacred place for rituals and festivals since ancient times.



18 North Outer Rim Pyroclastic Flow Geosite

The characteristics of the pyroclastic flow in Aso, such as the structure of welded tuff and the special scenery formed by erosion of the pyroclastic flow deposits, can be observed.



21 The Sankin-kotai Road Geosite

The Sankin-kotai* road utilized natural geographical features can be viewed. Sankin-kotai* is a system under which feudal lords in the Edo period were required to spend every other year in residence in Edo. This road was used by feudal lord and his followers when they went to Edo (Tokyo).



24 Cluster of Springs in Minami-Aso District Geosite

Natural springs in the southern part of the Aso Caldera are well-known with abundant and high quality water, producing filtrated water from the central volcanic cones and water from the south outer rim.



25 Jigoku and Tarutama Hot Springs Geosite

They are hot spring sites located at the exploded crater of Mt. Yomine and at its eroded area. The entire region is one of the few fumarolic areas in the central volcanic cone group. It has been popular as toji-ba (therapeutic bath) since the Edo Period.



28 Tawarayama Mountain Pass Caldera Geosite

The enormous caldera, the symbol of Aso Geopark, can be viewed from the south side. Here one can take in the clearly depressed geological formation and feel the rural farming rhythms in the caldera.



29 Tateno Gorge Geosite

Due to the movement of a fault on this site, this area is thought to have repeatedly seen the formation and disappearance of a caldera lake. That fact relates to the legend of kicking by Takeiwatatsuno-mikoto, the deity of Aso pathfinding.



31 Omine Volcano Geosite

Just before the formation of the current enormous caldera, the Omine Volcano came into being. Lava flows from this volcano formed a vast lava plateau. Evidence of past movements of the plateau caused by faulting motion can be observed.



32 Soyokyo Gorge Geosite

The beauty of a gorge which was formed by a shaped Aso pyroclastic flow deposits can be seen here.

Other Geosites

5 Furubochu Geosite
Reminders of a mountain religion and volcanic activity of Mt. Nakadake can be observed.

6 Sensuikyō Gorge Geosite
The relation between the special scenery created by volcano and rare species of plants can be learned.

7 Mt. Kijimadake Geosite
Volcanic geographic features which have not been eroded can be observed.

8 Fumotobochu Geosite
A town revived by Kato Kiyomasa. There are many temples, shrines and jizo (guardian deities of children).

9 Mt. Ogidake Geosite
Boasting a fine view of a pyroclastic flow plateau.

10 Koganotaki Fall Geosite
A waterfall on Sakanashi Rhyolite which forms a part of the outer rim.

12 Cluster of Springs in Aso Valley District Geosite
An uncommon area with an alluvial fan and a confined groundwater spring.

13 Futaenotouge Mountain Pass Geosite
The origin of the Aso Volcano can be learned from the caldera and river.

15 Uchinomaki Hot Spring Geosite
Historic hot spring which many writers visited from the old days.

19 Oguni-go Area Hot Spring Geosite
The best hot spring village in Kumamoto prefecture whose heat source is said to be Kuju Volcano.

20 Ikeyama and Yamabuki Geosite
Groundwater filtered through the Aso pyroclastic flow deposits springs out.

22 Kusakabe Geosite
A most uncommon shrine called Kudari-miya, where the shrine building is located in a lower area than the torii (the gateway to the shrine building).

23 Camel Mountain (Rakuda-yama) Geosite
The structure of intrusive rock and the development of joints can be clearly observed.

26 Nango Valley Geosite
An interesting geographical feature to learn about lakes and rivers after calderas were formed

27 Mt. Rakanyama Geosite
Various views of eroded or collapsed tuff breccia

30 Shiraitonotaki Falls Geosite
A waterfall thought to be located on older Aso volcanic rock.

33 Heitate Shrine Geosite
Surrounded by a natural environment, it is said to be the place of origin for Takama-ga-hara mythology.

Recommended courses to gain a better understanding of the theme of Aso Geopark

A Nakadake Crater: Feeling the Breath of the Earth

The active crater of Mt. Nakadake has emitted fumes and experienced repeated eruptions since prehistoric times. The grand scenery evokes the history of eruptions and various geographical and geological features can be observed.



B Tracing the History of the World-class Caldera and its Impact

With this course you can experience Aso while enjoying the caldera and vistas created by volcanoes and people.



C Blessings of the Aso Volcano ~Ancient life and Water~

Visiting the ancient and honored shrines and the head-springs of Aso, one is able to experience the livelihood handed down from ancient times.



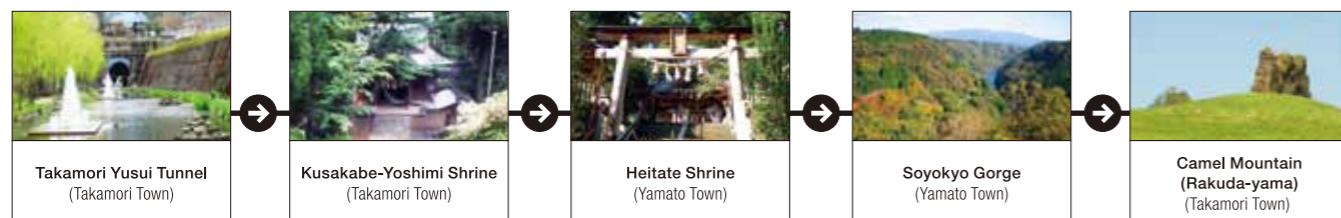
D Geography created by the Volcano and Lives of People

Observing geographical features formed by lava and pyroclastic flows from volcanic eruptions, one will also be touched by the wisdom of people living there.



E Tracing the Path of Aso and its Myths

There remains mythology regarding Takeiwatatsu-no-mikoto, the deity of path finding of Aso. This course introduces to you the wonders of Aso and its mythology.



We are making efforts to show many more people the charm of Aso Geopark and to deepen their understanding of the relation between the land and the livelihood of the area's inhabitants

Training the "Geoguide"

In order for visitors to learn the charm of the geopark and to deepen their understanding of Aso, geoguides who have a proper understanding of "geo" and the ability to explain it, the origin of Aso, and the livelihoods of the residents to visitors are required. We have emphasized the training of specialized geoguide who can convey the charms of Aso Geopark from the broader perspectives related to the geological, geographical, historical, traditional, and cultural aspects of the land.



Response and Information in Foreign Languages

We are also placing importance on our ability to give responses and information service in foreign languages. Our efforts include the opening of classes in foreign languages for the guides, publishing a booklet called "Mini Talk for Everyone", developing an Internet interpreting system, and creating multilingual guide books and maps. The sign board of each geosite has English.



Educational Activities for School Students

The Grassland Environment Learning Committee has established by social education facilities such as local livestock farmers community and museum. The project called "Aso Grassland Kids Project" has been carried out in order to maintain grassland in Aso and to promote environmental study.



Electric Powered Rental Bicycle

Views of flowering fields and local villages around the geosites are best enjoyed by bicycle. We recommend geosite tour by bicycle which is an environmentally-friendly vehicle.



Development of the Aso Geopark Brand

Local specialties of the Aso volcano are to be featured as geopark-related goods. Aso red beef, Aso takana-zuke, Aso buckwheat noodles and Aso local sake will be brand products in the near future.



Measures for Ensuring Safety and Security



Preservation of the Grassland

The grassland in the Aso region has been used and maintained by residents by *noyaki* (burning grass on the field) and grazing. In order to sustain the system for the maintenance of grasslands, the Aso Grassland Restoration Committee was established by the Ministry of the Environment as a leading body to encourage and support the *noyaki* volunteers.

Safety Measures

Improvement of mountain trails and checking of dangerous places are carried out with the collaboration of local experts, the police department and fire services in the mountainous region. "Ecotourism Guidelines" have been set by the Aso Ecotourism Association, which detail safety measures for geotours.

Emergency Countermeasures

Mt. Nakadake is an active volcano. The Aso Volcanic Disaster Prevention Council continuously monitors for volcanic activities and has developed countermeasures against volcanic gas and regulatory action for possible emergencies.

Four Base Facilities of Aso Geopark



The Aso Volcano Museum

Exhibits include the geography and geology of Aso, its volcanic activities, its flora and fauna, as well as the area's historical folklore. A live image from the camera set in the Nakadake crater is available. Education by curators is also available. [TEL] 0967-34-2111



Aso Den'en Kukan Eco Museum Office

The Eco Museum includes the entire city of Aso. People, living items, and livelihoods are displayed in an understandable way. The inheritance of nature, history, tradition, and culture is our mission. [TEL] 0967-35-5077



Minami-Aso Visitor Center

It is a facility to introduce the nature and livelihood of Aso. Various promotions to deepen the relation with the natural environment have been carried out. It has the "Aso Wild Flower Garden" where various flowers grown in Aso can be seen. [TEL] 0967-62-0911



Michi-no-eki Oguni "Yu Station"

The Michi-no-eki (roadside station) is built at the site of Oguni Station of the Miyahara line of a former national railway. Shops of local specialties, a rest area and gallery have been built. The Oguni Tourism Association has its office inside and provides information on the Ogunigo area. [TEL] 0967-46-4111