



Autumn is one of the more popular times of the year to visit the Akigawa Valley and see the leaves as they change color. Winter is a less crowded season and always stunningly beautiful. The Ishibunebashi Bridge is one of the most picturesque places in the valley.

Escape to Nature in the Akigawa Valley

A beautiful oasis just an hour from the center of Tokyo.

by **Kelly Wetherille**

With a population of over 13 million and a density of more than 6,000 people per square kilometer, it is no secret that Tokyo is one of the world's true megacities. But what many people may not realize is that it also encompasses a surprising amount of wilderness and green space. One of those areas is the Akigawa Valley, which can easily be reached by train in just an hour from the center of the city.

Located in western Tokyo and nestling Akiruno City and Hinohara Village, the area is beautiful year-round, making it the perfect quick escape from the frenetic pace of central Tokyo. Surrounded by beautiful nature and fresh, clean air, visitors will find it hard to believe that they are still technically in Tokyo.

One of the most enjoyable times to visit the valley is

in the autumn, when the trees change to vivid shades of orange, yellow, and red. One particularly striking spot is Kotokuji Temple, where two large ginkgo trees inside the massive Mountain Gate turn from green to bright yellow in mid-November.

The Akigawa Valley is home to numerous hiking trails. It also has a number of beautiful waterfalls, including the 30-meter-tall Otaki Falls, located along the hiking trail to Mt. Otake. Another photogenic spot is the Ishibunebashi Bridge, a narrow 96-meter-long pedestrian suspension bridge that offers sweeping views of the valley.

Fishing is another popular activity in the area. The clear water produces some delicious fish, and at the Akigawa International Trout Fishing Ground visitors can rent everything from rods and bait to barbecue sets. This makes

it possible to visit with no equipment whatsoever and to enjoy a freshly caught and grilled meal on the spot.

Fewer people visit the valley in the wintertime, making it even more peaceful than it is at other times of the year. Those lucky enough to visit during or shortly after a snowfall will be treated to the magnificent sight of the trees and mountains blanketed in stark white. This is best enjoyed from the warmth and comfort of Seoto-no-Yu Spa, a relaxing hot spring in the area, which also has restaurants and cottages. It goes without saying that the spa is captivating in any season.

Whenever you choose to visit the Akigawa Valley, you are sure to be treated to beautiful natural scenery that will make you soon forget that you are still in Tokyo.