



# Forest Adventure

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We are all too familiar with the typical equation when it comes to visiting a famed historical metropolis or a renowned cultural property: 1) you struggle through throngs of tourists to get to said location; 2) you spend precious moments at said location taking a snapshot (or, if you are lucky and do not mind angry glares, a selfie); and 3) you are forced to evacuate the area as quickly as possible or risk getting shoved aside by an unforgiving line of tourists.

However, it is never too late to take steps into the unknown – to ignite your sense of adventure by leaving your guidebook, and the already well-traveled path that it details, behind. And you, the reader, have already taken your first steps by opening the pages of this magazine.

Yamanashi Prefecture, a land whose many facets and various charms have yet to be thoroughly documented or discovered by the tourist, is an ideal location to embark on any number of adventures. This article focuses on one in particular that removes you from the hustle and bustle of city life and puts you into the quiet company of trees. But this is no summer picnic – in this adventure it is your task to navigate in and between those trees, relying only on your own balance, dexterity, and strength.



## Welcome to Forest Adventure

We set off in the morning by car. An hour and a half away from Kofu City, the prefectural capital, the journey took us into the northeasternmost parts of the prefecture. The drive was smooth, the roads having been recently renovated. And what a picturesque day.

We stepped out of the car to be greeted by clear blue skies and rolling green hills. “FOREST ADVENTURE KOSUGE,” the sign read up ahead. Before us were steps leading to a thinned forest clearing, and from the parking lot below we could see hints of intricate wooden obstacles, crisscrossing ropes and slacklines, and long-stretching zip-lines. I felt my excitement awakened, ready for any challenge that lay ahead.

The concept had originally been developed in France in 1997 by the company Altus, but it has since then been exported to over fifteen different countries. Forest Adventure in Kosuge Village is one of twenty-five other parks in Japan under the same name. Opened in 2013, it is known for having the most scenic zip-slide view in Japan. Yamanashi Prefecture is home to another

Forest Adventure park in Narusawa Village. This was the first to be created in Japan and the most famous. Located nearby the base of Mt. Fuji, it allows for stunning views of Japan’s most iconic mountain – from the unique perspective of up in the trees.

One of the goals of constructing these treetop courses is to revitalize otherwise neglected forest areas. Almost 67% of Japan is forested, yet much of that number is unattended to, resulting in canopy growth too dense for sunlight to any longer reach the ground. To re-stimulate the growth of diverse species of plants, human intervention is required to thin these forests. Forest Adventure accomplishes this, but it also provides lovers of the outdoors with an experience unlike any other.

When visiting a Forest Adventure park, the goal for the adventurer is to have fun, to stay safe, and to challenge oneself. With courses available for children (Canopy Course), for families (Discovery Course), and for adults (Adventure Course), there is plenty of opportunity for all ages and all persons to meet and exceed each of those goals without ever stepping outside of one’s comfort zone.

After signing an agreement (also available in English) in recognition of the possibility of injury, our first task when arriving was to learn the safety protocol. A staff member gave a brief, verbal overview of the harness, the carabiners, and the pulley cable system before detailing our first task: without instruction, we were to navigate a miniature, practice course on our own. The

intent here was to ensure that we could manage the equipment responsibly by ourselves before taking our first steps onto the real course. The staff member, of course, would monitor us from below – but he would not be accompanying us.

Successfully completed, we ascended into the treetops, now confident in our readiness to embark on the first of five stages in the Adventure Course. Each segment posed various challenges: climbing, crawling, balancing, swinging, hanging, gliding, or jumping. One by one we committed ourselves to each task at hand, trusting the strength of the ropes we were clipped to and putting our physical abilities to the test.

At points in each stage, an “extra difficult” route was available. It took every ounce of my energy and concentration not to fall at these points. Tip toeing across hanging wooden poles with a

diameter the size of a small tomato was not an easy task.

Laughing together with (and sometimes at) my coworkers as we attempted (and sometimes failed) to make it past each obstacle is what made this day most memorable. Unlike the throngs of people through which one must fight when visiting the typical tourist destination, this day took place in the absolute stillness of the rural

countryside. Surrounded by nothing but lush woodland and proud mountaintops, the only thought on my mind was the task in front of me: to work together with my coworkers to make it through the treetop course. The experience became an opportunity to see and to know each other in a new light. That, and an opportunity to amount a collective total of almost five hundred photographs – or at least more than the blurry scraps of a single selfie that my friends on social media seem to garner when uploading their visits to the Louvre or The Great Wall.

While living and learning in Japan, it is up to you how you spend your time whether here as a temporary traveler or as a permanent resident. And while it is a valuable experience to visit the most well-known cultural heritage sites and the most famous cities in order to learn more about Japan’s history, culture, art, music, literature, or whatever else is of interest to you, it is my belief that there is beauty in exploring the unknown. Yamanashi Prefecture is a prime location to do just that, and Forest Adventure is an example of a getaway that not only brings you away from the city and into the countryside but also places you up into the trees, from which point you can see and feel Japan’s natural beauty for yourself, up close. It is also a fun and unique experience, especially for those like me and my coworkers who had never before embarked on such a treetop adventure. And, like the best of adventures, it is also one that brings you closer to those traveling alongside you.

May your adventure start soon. Best of luck!

