

# James' 8 hints for Oze: things to do and avoid in Oze National Park



Oze National Park (Oze), a Ramsar site is a fun and easily accessible ecotourism destination, but it is also a natural environment with some rugged features. Oze is also a protected place, meaning that some activities are prohibited. This article offers 8 hints for enjoying Oze to the fullest while avoiding potential pitfalls or prohibited activities.

James McGill

HINT  
1

## Hit the gym! 🧘

Oze has a wide range of hiking and trekking courses for hikers of all levels. However, even the most popular short course: the approximately 6 km (roundtrip) course from the Hatomachitoge Pass to Yamanohana Visitor Center is more than a 2 hour walk and the return trip involves a gradual but steady uphill climb over boardwalks and steps. Even families with small children use this course, so it is definitely accessible to almost everyone. However, if you are not a regular exerciser, you might want to do a week or two of regular walks (Ideally including some hills or inclines) to prepare yourself. Some of the hiking courses are quite physically demanding and require considerable stamina and core strength. To be on the safe side, plan your route in advance and get advice from a local guide if possible.



HINT  
3

## Leave nothing behind

The ultimate goal of all visitors to Oze is to depart without leaving any footprint. Unlike the famous 2003 Vegas ad, 'What comes to Oze leaves Oze!'. To protect Oze's natural environment, pollution from outside materials is strictly regulated. This means you should assume that you will carry out everything you brought with you when you leave the park. There are no trash cans or waste boxes, so plastic bags, food wrappings and packages, tissues etc., must all be carried out of the park with you when you leave. Thus, at the very minimum, you will probably need to bring a large plastic bag that is dedicated for storing your discarded items.

HINT  
2

## A mountain is a mountain!

An annual ritual of winter Japanese TV is reporting on inadequately dressed tourists being stranded on Mt Fuji. Visitors tend to forget that Mt. Fuji (Altitude 3776m) is a mountain due to its easy accessibility from Tokyo and amusement park atmosphere. If you intend to hike in the Oze mountains make sure that you are prepared. While you should consult the relevant Oze websites for detailed advice, some general recommendations are:

- 1) Dress appropriately.** Good hiking shoes are important and you should also bring clothes that allow you to respond to sudden weather events and rapid temperature changes.
- 2) Carry some emergency food.** The chances of becoming stranded in Oze are low, but just in case you want to have some dried snacks, protein bars, etc. to tide you over if you need to spend a night in the mountains, for example.



HINT  
4

## Roughing it

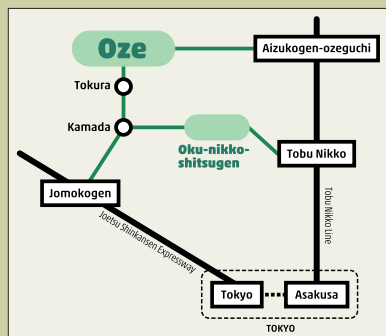
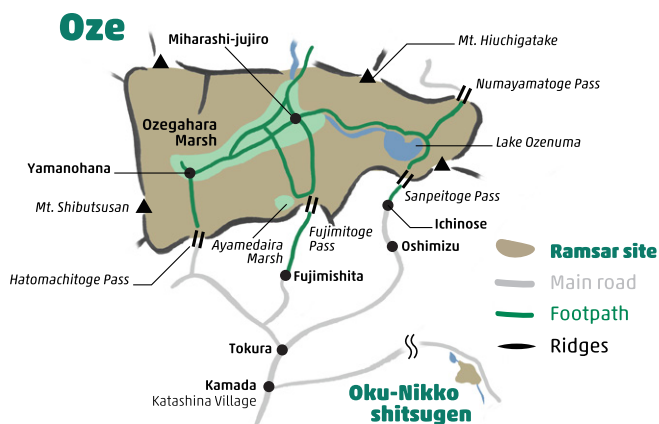
Oze's mountain lodges are surprisingly comfortable, so it is easy to forget that their primary role is to serve as places of rest and refuge for mountain visitors. If you require first-class hotel accommodations, stay home! Apparently, it is common wisdom among experienced hikers and climbers that in order to prevent pollution of the natural environment, the use of chemical-based toiletries such as soaps and shampoos should be avoided. The reason is that anything you pour down the drain will ultimately end up as effluent flowing into the park. Normally, no hand washing soap is provided in the lodges, but a special temporary exception has been made in response to Covid - 19. Hand sanitizing gels are also a good way to keep your hands clean.

3 other quick points regarding Oze mountain lodges:

- 1) Be on time.** The mountain lodges have skeleton staffs that work under difficult conditions. When they say dinner starts at 17:00 they mean it! 🧘 Being even 5 minutes late for dinner or breakfast will throw off everyone's schedule.
- 2) Bring a mobile battery.** There is no place to charge your smartphones or other electronic devices, and if you leave your smartphone turned on you will find that the battery tends to run down faster than normal due to the poor reception in the mountains. If you want to guarantee that you will be able to surf the net or check your email before turning in, bring a mobile battery.
- 3) Bring a portable light or flashlight.** For example, if the lodges inform you that there will be 'lights out at 21:00', they aren't joking! 🧘 The electrical generating ability of the lodges is severely limited, so they enforce a strict lights out policy to save energy. At night a mountain becomes pitch black, so you won't be able to see anything in your room without some kind of light!



## Map



### For further information, please click the sites below:

<https://www.env.go.jp/en/nature/nps/park/oze/index.html>

<https://www.oze-fnd.or.jp/en/>

<https://pwwj.org/eaters-of-the-mizubasho-oze/>

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## HINT 5

### 100 Yen Toilet Fees

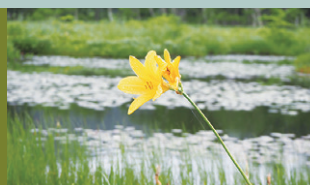
In order to support the park infrastructure, visitors are asked to pay a 100 Yen 'tip' whenever they use one of the Oze public toilets located at the various visitor centers and rest stops. The toilets are quite clean and well-maintained, so 100 Yen (A little more than 1 USD) is a small price to pay. Also, if you are planning a long hike, it is probably a good idea to check the locations of the public toilets on your route. You also might want to limit your consumption of coffee or tea as they have a diuretic effect.



## HINT 7

### 'Don't feed the animals'

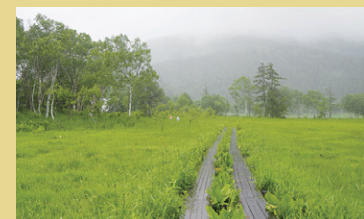
Although the chance to view animals in their natural environment is one of the biggest attractions of eco-tourism, how to maintain the proper distance is a tricky issue. Oze has 2 types of large animals: Asian Black Bears and Sika Deer. Of course, directly feeding bears in Oze would be out-of-the question. It would be dangerous for you and instill bad habits in the bears. Luckily, the bears in Oze tend to be reclusive, so they will avoid you if you make enough noise to advertise your presence. If you are lucky enough to spot an Asian Black Bear, make sure it is from a considerable distance! 😊 As for deer, you will seldom see them during the daytime. However, you don't want to leave any food wastes that might attract them at night.



## HINT 6

### Keep off the grass!

The boardwalks (and steps) running through Oze offer trekkers a safe path through the park and also protect plants and grasses from being trampled. You might be tempted to 'stray from the path' in order to get a better angle for a scenic shot or a closeup of a beautiful flower, but please stay on the boardwalk. If you have to leave the boardwalk because of gaps or unsafe sections, get back on it as soon as you safely can.



## HINT 8

### Consider hiring a guide

The boardwalks and visitor centers make it easy for individuals, groups, or even families with small children to take unguided tours of the park. However, there are lots of good reasons to utilize the services of a guide:

1) **Safety.** As I mentioned in Hint 1, some hiking trails are quite physically demanding. They could be potentially dangerous for inexperienced hikers or climbers.

2) **An enhanced Oze experience.** Wetlands and their surroundings often seem deceptively simple. Sometimes you think you are just grazing at vast fields of grasses or reeds with small ponds or lakes sprinkled throughout. However, wetlands are often highly complex ecosystems with rich biodiversity. Oze is a vast network of marshes, forest, mountains and rivers. Having someone who can explain to you all the various parts and how they interrelate makes a huge difference. Your guide can also explain Oze's unique history and why it is one of the most important natural conservation areas in Japan.

3) **Trail coffee and snacks.** After you have been trekking for hours, having your guide announce an unexpected stop in front of Lake Ozenuma and pull a pot of hot coffee out of his/her backpack is a really pleasant surprise (Okay: I know I spoiled it, but act surprised anyway... 😊)!

