



A “therapy road” in the Tengu Highland Natural Recreational Forest

The Shikoku Karst Tengu Highland Natural Recreational Forest: A Refreshing Corridor in the Sky

The Shikoku region is located in the southwestern part of the Japanese archipelago. Approximately in the center of the region, on a plateau that rises 1,000 to 1,500 meters above sea level, is the Shikoku Karst, which stretches 25 kilometers from east to west. The term “karst” refers to a type of landscape made up of limestone and other rocks that are exposed on the earth’s surface due to erosion caused by rain and other factors. On the eastern edge of the Shikoku Karst, there is a vast woodland, called the Tengu Highland Natural Recreational Forest, which is traversed by “therapy roads,” hiking paths said to be quite therapeutic. We interviewed Kake-mizu Kazuhiko, who works as a forest guide. (TEXT: Morohashi Kumiko)



Shikoku Karst landscape with limestone formations protruding from the ground



Photo: Ishizawa Yoji

Hoshifuru Village TENGU, the starting point of a therapy road

The Shikoku Karst Tengu Highland Natural Recreational Forest, also known as a “Refreshing Corridor in the Sky,” is located 1,485 meters above sea level within the boundaries of Tsuno Town, Kochi Prefecture. It is an untouched forest certified as a forest therapy base.¹ Kakemizu works as a guide for the Tengu Highland Therapy Roads at Hoshifuru Village TENGU, a hotel in the Tengu Highland.

“The Tengu Highland is located in the Shikoku Karst, one of the three major karst areas in Japan. The Shikoku Karst is a unique geological landscape formed when limestone rocks that rose from the ocean floor some 250 million years ago were eroded over time by rainwater and groundwater. A significant feature is that the karst stretches like a belt across Ehime and Kochi prefectures for about 25 kilometers. The Tengu Highland Natural Recreational Forest is located at the eastern end of the Shikoku Karst. It is famous for its high altitude and beautiful views.”

A high plateau covered with vast grasslands dominates most of the Shikoku Karst area. There are exposed limestone formations that are often compared to flocks of sheep, as well as pastures where cattle can be seen grazing peacefully. To the east of the grasslands is a very different landscape — the Tengu Highland Natural Recreational Forest, a vast untouched woodland where visitors can experience nature from season to season. Currently, there are several walking roads certified as therapy roads in the natural recreational forest, each with a different atmosphere for visitors to enjoy. The most popular is called Shikoku no Michi. This hike, to and from Ohikiwari, a rock crevice designated as a nat-

ural monument, takes about five hours. Kakemizu told, “However, the road is too steep, so I think it wouldn’t be therapeutic to walk the road all at once. Therefore I used to lead visitors on a gentle one-kilometer section surfaced with Japanese cypress wood chips, one of the popular parts of Shikoku no Michi.”

“There is a Japanese cypress sawmill at the foot of the plateau. I experienced the soothing effect of the scent of the wood chips, which were discarded as a by-product of the grinding process. I suggested that they be used to surface the trail. My idea was accepted and led to the creation of a therapy road surfaced with wood chips.”

The wood chips are replaced regularly so that visitors can enjoy the scent of fresh cypress. Participants on the guided tours are encouraged to take about an hour to walk the approximately two-kilometer round trip at a leisurely pace and enjoy a relaxed interaction with nature.

“Guests often ask me ‘How many kilometers do I need to walk in order to feel the benefits?’ My answer is that forest therapy requires only one step into the forest to experience sufficient benefits. I encourage them to be mindful of using the five senses to bring nature into their bodies through the soft feel of the wood chips, the early morning calls of wild


birds, and the texture of different types of trees. As you can see, the natural recreational forest here is rich in healing properties. I would like to invite everyone who gets the chance to visit the Shikoku Karst Highland and enjoy a stroll in the untouched forest.” 



Photo: Ishizawa Yoji

A walking road paved with Japanese cypress wood chips



Photo: Ishizawa Yoji

Shikoku no Michi



Photo: Ishizawa Yoji

Rhododendron Decandrum (a type of azalea) flowers seen on the therapy road in May

1. Certified according to the forest therapy base concept promoted by the Forest Therapy Executive Committee (composed of representatives of the Forestry Agency, the National Land Afforestation Promotion Organization, and the Japan Wellness Society).