

15 Eerie Things About Japan's Suicide Forest



Northwest of the majestic Mount Fuji is the sprawling [13.5 square miles](#) of Aokigahara, a forest so thick with foliage that it's known as the Sea of Trees. But it's the Japanese landmark's horrific history that made the woods a fitting location for the spooky horror film [The Forest](#). Untold visitors have chosen this place, notoriously called The Suicide Forest, as the setting for their final moments, walking in with no intention of ever walking back out. Here are a few of the terrible truths and scary stories that forged Aokigahara's morbid reputation.

1. AOKIGAHARA IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR SUICIDE DESTINATIONS IN THE WORLD.

Statistics on Aokigahara's suicide rates vary, in part because the forest is so lush that some corpses can go undiscovered for years or might be forever lost. However, some estimates claim as many as [100 people a year](#) have successfully killed themselves there.

2. JAPAN HAS A LONG TRADITION OF SUICIDE.

Self-inflicted death doesn't carry the same stigma in this nation as it does in others. Seppuku—a samurai's ritual suicide thought to be honorable—dates back to Japan's feudal era. And while the practice is no longer the norm, it has left a mark.

"Vestiges of the seppuku culture can be seen today in the way suicide is viewed as a way of taking responsibility," [said](#) Yoshinori Cho, author of *Why do People Commit Suicide?* and director of the psychiatry department at Teikyo University in Kawasaki, Kanagawa.

3. JAPAN HAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST SUICIDE RATES IN THE WORLD.

The global financial crisis of 2008 made matters worse, resulting in [2,645 recorded suicides](#) in January 2009, a 15 percent increase from the previous year. The numbers reached their peak in March, the end of Japan's financial year. In 2011, the executive director of a suicide prevention hotline told [Japan Times](#), "Callers most frequently cite mental health and family problems as the reason for contemplating suicide. But behind that are other issues, such as financial problems or losing their job."

4. SUICIDE PREVENTION ATTEMPTS INCLUDE SURVEILLANCE AND POSITIVE POSTS.

Because of the high suicide rate, Japan's government enacted a plan of action that aims to reduce such rates by 20 percent within the next seven years. Part of these measures included posting security cameras at the entrance of the Suicide Forest and increasing patrols. Suicide counselors and police have also posted signs on various paths throughout the forest that offer messages like "Think carefully about your children, your family" and "Your life is a precious gift from your parents."

5. IT'S NATURALLY EERIE.

Bad reputation aside, this is no place for a leisurely stroll. The forest's trees organically twist and turn, their roots winding across the forest floor in treacherous threads. Because of its location at the base of a mountain, the ground is uneven, rocky, and perforated with hundreds of caves. But more jarring than its tricky terrain is the feeling of isolation created from the stillness; the trees are too tightly packed for winds to whip through and the wildlife is sparse. One visitor [described](#) the silence as "chasms of emptiness." She added, "I cannot emphasize enough the absence of sound. My breath sounded like a roar."

6. DEATH BY HANGING IS THE MOST POPULAR METHOD OF SUICIDE AMONG THE SEA OF TREES.

The second [is said to be](#) poisoning, often by drug overdose.

7. A NOVEL POPULARIZED THIS DARK TRADITION. . .

In 1960, Japanese writer Seichō Matsumoto released the tragic novel [Kuroi Jukai](#), in which a heartbroken lover retreats to the Sea of Trees to end her life. This romantic

imagery has proved a seminal and sinister influence on Japanese culture. Also, looped into this lore: *The Complete Suicide Manual*, which dubs Aokigahara "[the perfect place to die](#)." The book has been found among the abandoned possessions of various Suicide Forest visitors.

8. BUT IT WAS NOT THE START OF THE FOREST'S DARK LEGACY.

Ubasute is a brutal form of euthanasia that translates roughly to "abandoning the old woman." An uncommon practice—only resorted to in desperate times of famine—where a family would lessen the amount of mouths to feed by leading an elderly relative to a mountain or similarly remote and rough environment to die, not by means of suicide but by dehydration, starvation, or exposure. Some insist this was not a real occurrence, but rather grim folklore. Regardless, stories of the Sea of Trees being a site for such abandonment have long been a part of its mythos.

9. THE SUICIDE FOREST MAY BE HAUNTED.

Some believe the ghosts—or yurei—of those abandoned by ubasute and the mournful spirits of the suicidal linger in the woods. Folklore claims they are vengeful, dedicated to tormenting visitors and luring those that are sad and lost off the path.

10. ANNUAL SEARCHES HAVE BEEN HELD THERE SINCE 1970.

There are volunteers who do patrol the area, making interventional efforts. However, these annual endeavors are not intended to rescue people, but to recover their remains. Police and volunteers trek through the Sea of Trees to bring bodies back to civilization for a proper burial. In recent years, the Japanese government has declined to release the numbers of corpses recovered from these gruesome searches. But in the early 2000s, [70 to 100](#) were uncovered each year.

11. BRINGING A TENT INTO THE FOREST SUGGESTS DOUBT.

Camping is allowed in the area but visitors who bring a tent with them are believed to be undecided on their suicide attempt. Some will camp for days, debating their fates. People on prevention patrol will gently speak with such campers, entreating them to leave the forest.

12. THE SUICIDE FOREST IS SO THICK THAT SOME VISITORS USE TAPE TO AVOID GETTING LOST.

Volunteers who search the area for bodies and those considering suicide typically mark their way with plastic ribbon that they'll loop around trees in this leafy labyrinth. Otherwise, one could easily lose their bearings after leaving the path and become fatally lost.

13. YOU MAY NOT BE ABLE TO CALL FOR HELP.

Rich with magnetic iron, the soil of the Suicide Forest plays havoc on cellphone service, GPS systems, and even compasses. This is why tape can be so crucial. But some believe this feature is proof of demons in the dark.

14. NOT EVERYONE WHO GOES THERE HAS DEATH ON THEIR AGENDA.

Locals lament that this natural wonder is known first and foremost for its lethal allure. Still, tourists can take in gorgeous views of Mount Fuji and visit [highlights](#) like the distinctive lava plateau, 300-year-old trees, and the enchanting Narusawa Ice Cave.

15. GOING OFF THE PATH CAN LEAD TO GHASTLY DISCOVERIES.

The Internet is littered with disturbing images from the Suicide Forest, from abandoned personal effects snared in the undergrowth to human bones and even more grisly remains strewn across the forest floor or dangling from branches. So if you dare to venture into this forbidding forest, do as the signs suggest and stay on the path.