



Photo: Akan- Mashu National Park (Hokkaido)

## Visit! National Parks

Winter & Early Spring

February, 2019

The Ministry of Environment, responsible for the nation's National Parks has established the; 'Visit! National Park Project'; which is primarily focused toward promoting (initially) 8 pilot National Parks to the international market as a new or alternative travel destination.

Of the 34 National Parks of Japan, the pilot National Parks were selected for their geographical locations, spanning north to south of Japan, in addition to specific landscape characteristics, tourism activities and surrounding communities which provide visitors with unique experiences.

This digital newsletter will attempt to introduce; in addition to events, various activities, experiences and sights to be seen at each Park, details on the latest developments and improvements being made within the 8 National Parks to enhance visitor experience.

The 8 pilot National Parks are;

**Akan-Mashu**  
**Towada-Hachimantai,**  
**Nikko**  
**Ise-Shima**  
**Daisen-Okii**  
**Aso-Kuju**  
**Kirishima-Kinkowan**  
**Keramashoto**

**This newsletter will be sent in three sections; Section One will cover Hokkaido & the Tohoku National Parks, Section Two introduces the Kanto & Western Japan National Parks, Section Three covers the Kyushu & Okinawa National Parks.**

### Visitor Centers

Visitors will find that Japan's national parks differ, in many respects, from those found in the United States, or other countries. Japanese national parks do not have established gates, there is no admission fee, no fencing of a park's perimeter, and the existence of shrines, temples and communities within parks often make it difficult for visitors to perceive that they are indeed within a national park.

**Visitor Centers** can be found in every national park of Japan. The facilities were established and structured to provide multi-language information material (brochures/route maps) that reflect the parks' layout, history and flora/fauna characteristics. By stationing bi-lingual staff, direct interaction is made possible, enhancing their objective to assist and advise on how to make the most of a visitor's park visit. A variety of displays, photographs, audio/visual presentations are implemented to make easy observation of a park's geographical characteristics. The Centers are equipped with parking areas, free Wi-Fi, toilets and other amenities for visitor convenience.

It is strongly recommended that a stop be made to the Visitor Center by visitors prior to setting off to explore or enjoy the facilities/activities provided within the park. Doing so will make a huge difference in the level of fulfillment and satisfaction of the visit to the park.

# Hokkaido & Tohoku National Parks

## Akan-Mashu National Park (Hokkaido)

### Towada-Hachimantai National Park (Aomori, Akita, Iwate)

Experience winter at its best. Although the National Parks of this region can be enjoyed throughout the year, there are a multitude of natural wonders to be seen particularly in the winter months. There are annual festivals that entice the locals and visitors alike to come out and enjoy the brisk night air.

If you enjoy skiing, this region provides a multitude of slopes, as well as backcountry courses. Snowshoeing has proven to be a highly popular method to enjoy the snow-covered trails and tracks of the National Parks.

## Akan-Mashu National Park (Hokkaido)



Frost Flower(©Akan Tourism Association & Community Development Promotion Organization)

### Geographical Characteristics

Geographically, Akan-Mashu National Park, it is formed from three calderas combined, making it the largest caldera formation in Japan. The caldera formations give the park its lakes, mountains and ridges. Notably the two lakes; Akan Ko (lake) and Mashu Ko (lake) from which the park takes its name, and Lake Kussharo, the largest body of water, and mountains such as; Mt. O-akan, Mt. M-Akan, Mt. Nishbetsu and Mt. Hakuto.

## Average Temperature (December – March)

Lows: minus 10 degrees Celsius or colder

Highs: 0 to 5 degrees Celsius

## Visitor Centers & Eco-Museums

### The Akan Area

- Akankohan Eco-museum Center (access location with Google Map)
- Akanko Marimukan (access location with Google Map)

### The Mashu Area

- Kawayu Eco-museum Center (access location with Google Map)

For further details of facilities within Akan-Mashu National Park, visit;

[Facilities](#)

## Winter Experiences

Many people may think that summer is the best time to visit national parks. Particularly if the park is located in Hokkaido where the temperatures are *extremely* low, with heavy snow and ice will make most people think twice about a visit. Walking on frozen lakes, skiing, snowshoeing or just exploring an area blanketed in snow, not to mention witnessing natural phenomena brought on by the cold temperature, makes winter one of the best times to visit this park. Here are a few reasons why winter is an exceptional time to visit.

### • Akan International Crane Center

In Japan, the crane or *tsuru*, is a national treasure. It is a symbol of longevity and good luck because it is thought to have a life span of a thousand years. *Tsuru* are also monogamous, therefore, frequently used as motifs in wedding décor. The practice of hand-feeding cranes originated at this Center, where the red-crowned cranes can be observed in conditions that closely resemble their natural habitat.

**Feeding takes place at 14:00.** The winter months of **January to February**, wild cranes make the compound surrounding the Center their wintering grounds, making it an ideal period to visit.



Akan International Crane Center

### • Lake Akan Ice Festival

Akan-cho (*Akan Town*) is well known as a center of the Ainu people who honor and carry on the traditions of their ancestors. Shops that display the arts and crafts unique to the Ainu can be seen throughout Akan. Held from **February 1<sup>st</sup> to March 3<sup>rd</sup>**, this festival highlights Ainu culture through a variety of evening performances and fireworks. Don't miss out on the 'ceremony' that begins at **19:50** every evening.



- **The ‘Mashu Blue’**

The Lake Mashu Observatory provides a bird-eye view of ‘Mashu Blue’, a natural contrast of the lake’s blue water surrounded by the white of snow, which can be seen from late **December** to late **February**.



Mashu Lake

- **Climbing & Hiking**

There is no better way to enjoy a visit to the national park as climbing and hiking. Mountains and routes are detailed in the website of National Parks by the Ministry of Environment. Don't forget snowshoes are essential for winter hiking.

For further details, visit;  
[Recommend Courses](#)

## **Early Spring Experiences**

Spring arrives late in Akan-Mashu National Park, when it does finally arrive, it is with full force.



### Average Temperature (March-May)

Lows: minus 3.6 degrees Celsius or colder

Highs: 0 to 5 degrees Celsius

- **Lake Akan Candle Ice Cruises**

The thick ice covering Lake Akan begins to melt from mid to late April, allowing ordinary cruise boats passage from May 1<sup>st</sup>. To offer tourists an ice breaker cruise experience, the Candle Ice Cruises operate from **April 21<sup>st</sup>** for a limited timeframe of **one week**. An exhilarating experience to witness the amazing way the ice almost looks like it is melted candle wax, particularly for visitors who come from warm or hot climate regions. Contact: Akan Kanko Kisen TEL: 0154-67-2511



- **The ‘Marimo’**

Lake Akan is home to **marimo**, only found in this lake, making it a symbol of the lake. This rare alga species naturally forms into beautiful green balls. Left alone for a few centuries, Lake Akan's marimo can reach the size of soccer balls. This alga is designated as a ‘National Special Natural Monument’. Guided tours are available from **May 1<sup>st</sup>** to November 30<sup>th</sup>. View: <http://en.kushiro-lakeakan.com/>



(©Akan Tourism Association & Community  
Development Promotion Organization)

Marimo Exhibition and Observation Center



## Towada-Hachimantai National Park (Aomori, Akita, Iwate)



Hakkoda Snow Monster

### Geographical Characteristics

Towada-Hachimantai National Park borders the three prefectures of; Aomori, Akita, and Iwate of the Tohoku (northeastern) region of the island of Honshu Japan. The Park's name derives from Lake Towada and the Mt. Hachimantai. The park is separated into two areas; the northern area encompassing Lake Towada and Hakkoda Mountains, and the southern Hachimantai area. The two areas are located approximately 50 kilometers apart, each offering its own beautiful scenery as well as, activities. Craters of a double caldera remain at Lake Towada from which the Oirase Gorge (*Keiryu*) flows.

### Average Temperature (December – March)

Lows: Minus 3.9 degrees Celsius or colder

Highs: 3.7 degrees Celsius

### Visitor Centers

#### The Lake Towada Area

- Towada Visitor Center (access location thru Google Map)

#### Oirase-Gorge Area

- Oirase-Keiryu kan (access location thru Google Map)

For further details of facilities within Towada-Hachimantai National Park, visit;

[Facilities](#)

### Winter Experiences

The winters at Towada-Hachimantai National Park is made memorable by the sheer amount of snow. Venturing with snowshoes, or skiing through fantastic formations that are the result of powdery snow blown onto the trunk and branches of the fir surrounding the area, transforming trees into immense snow

sculptures. The Oirase Gorge (*Keiryu*), shows a totally different face in winter, in comparison to the popular Autumn or Spring seasons. The numerous waterfalls have become curtains of ice. For those who enjoy relaxing and soaking in hot springs (*onsen*), the number and variety of facilities provide easy access to this age-old Japanese therapeutic bathing tradition.

## Hakkoda Backcountry Skiing

A ropeway transports skier to a height of 1,300 meters, to the Hakkoda Mountains Ropeway Station, from where skiing down through the forest of beech and fir, is one of the characteristics of the Towada-Hachimantai National Park. Skiers can opt for enjoying the slopes or signing up for a backcountry tour at the Station. From **January to February** the area offers premium powder snow conditions. Skiing can be enjoyed until early May. Contact: Hakkoda Park Co., Ltd. Phone: 017-738-8589



Hakkoda Backcountry Skiing

- **Oyunuma Snowshoeing Tour**

This tour will take visitors through the 'Goshogake Nature Research Route' a walking trail near the Goshogake hot spring. As a highlight of the tour, geothermal phenomena related to volcanoes can be seen. At an altitude of 1000m, the destination of this exhilarating snowshoe walk through virgin powder snow is Oyunuma where visitors can witness the steam soaring skyward. An amazing sight and experience of the Earth's energy. The tour includes a coffee break.

Note: For safety purposes, it is highly recommended that for those who wish to visit Oyunuma to get a close view of the geothermal activity during winter, to reserve a **guided tour**.

Contact: Natural Parks Foundation Hachimantai Branch Phone: 0186-25-8846(During Winter)、0186-31-2714(During Summer) Mail: [hati@bes.or.jp](mailto:hati@bes.or.jp)



Oyunuma Snowshoe Trekking

- **Climbing & Hiking**

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## **Early Spring Experiences**

The slow but sure change from winter to spring can be experienced in the budding of beechtrees, and the various flora of the national park. The ground that was covered with snow emerges to make way for spring. High altitude areas are still covered with snow, allowing visitors to enjoy the double pleasure of winter sport within early spring sunshine and scenery.

- **Hachimantai Dragon Eye**

Kagaminuma is one of the ponds that lie near the summit of Mt. Hachimantai. Roughly 50 meters in diameter, as the snow begins to melt between late-May. A portion of snow remains in the center of the pond that reflects the sky on its blue, transparent surface. This natural phenomenon, only visible for certain period, has come to be known as the "Dragon Eye" for the unthawed center of the lake resembles a massive dragon's eye.



The Dragon Eye of Kagaminuma Pond

## **Hakkoda Spring Skiing**

The Hakkoda Mountains has several high peaks, such as Otake (1,585 meters) and Takada-Otake (1,552 meters). At the Hakkoda Ropeway ski area, spring skiing can be enjoyed until early-May.





Hakkoda Mountain Range

- **Hachimantai Snow Corridor**

Those of you who enjoy particular seasonal experiences, The Hachimantai Aspice ('Shield Volcano' in German) Line is a perfect driving course that runs near the summit of Mt. Hachimantai (1,613 meters). In mid-April, after the snow that had blocked the road cleared, a massive 'Snow Corridor' appears. In some areas, the height of the 'Snow Corridor' wall reaches up to 8 meters. The Jukai Line (sea of trees) opens in late-April, attracting many to the area.



Snow Corridor