A Scenic Country, Japan

Solitary mountain peaks, covered with snow all year round, soar into the air, while islands of various sizes are scattered on a spring sea gleaming like a mirror.

Forests and lakes turn to brilliant shades of autumn color like a piece of brocade...

a variety of natural views are displayed in all four seasons everywhere in the country, which capture hearts of many people.
Since ancient times, Japanese have sensed the beginning of a new season by bird migration. In late fall, mallard and swans fly from the north, spend winter in Japan and return to the north in spring. Other species, such as swallows and gray-faced buzzard eagles, migrate from the south in early spring, and nurture juveniles in summer. Snipes and plovers visit the country both in spring and fall on the way to their final destinations. The National Parks play a vital role as habitats of these migratory birds and other wildlife.
In late March, when cherry trees begin blooming in southern Kyushu and Shikoku, Japanese people start caring about ‘Cherry blossom front’, which forecasts expected dates for cherry blossoms. For the following a month and half, cherry blossom front moves slowly up to the north in the Japanese archipelago. People are anxious to view the gorgeous full blooming and are fascinated with the transient nature of flowers dying in a few days and a beauty in the way of falling petals.
Summer

The glow of seas and mountains,
The song of life
in praise of the earth

The summer of the archipelagic sea (Seto inland sea NP) (1)
A flower carpet spreading over near the summit of Mt. Hakuba-dake,
the Japan Northern Alps (Chubu-sangaku NP) (2)

Summer is the season for mountain hiking. The mountains in north of central Japan offer an amusement for hikers to spot fields of wildflowers. As climbing a mountain trail patiently, where trees become sparse, hikers will find the garden of colorful alpine flowers spreading like a carpet. Alpine plants are adapted to harsh alpine environments such as low temperatures, strong wind and prolonged periods of snow pack. Most species bloom all at once in the short summer. The lovely and healthy life forms determined to survive in such severity is a remarkable view, etched into hiker’s memories.

A mountain high paradise
—The garden of wildflowers

Summer is the season for mountain hiking. The mountains in north of central Japan offer an amusement for hikers to spot fields of wildflowers. As climbing a mountain trail patiently, where trees become sparse, hikers will find the garden of colorful alpine flowers spreading like a carpet. Alpine plants are adapted to harsh alpine environments such as low temperatures, strong wind and prolonged periods of snow pack. Most species bloom all at once in the short summer. The lovely and healthy life forms determined to survive in such severity is a remarkable view, etched into hiker’s memories.

Islands of Yaeyama in the coral sea (Iriomote NP) (4)

A flower garden on a major ridge of Asahi Mountain Range (Bandai-Asahi NP) (5)

Kushiro River, flowing through the wetlands (Kushiro-shitsugen NP) (3)
Clear mountain streams, Colorful meadows and forests

Japan is said to have the most splendid autumn leaves because of its abundant and diverse deciduous broad-leaved forests. In fall, a variety of deciduous species, such as maple, Katsura tree and mountain ash, turn red or yellow with delicately varied shades of color, which covers the mountain surface. The vividness of autumn color is different every year even at a same location because it depends on temperature variability and moisture conditions. Japanese people go out in the fields and mountains seeking for the view of autumn leaves, which has been a popular activity since 1000 years ago. Towada Lake, Oirase Stream and Oirase, and other famous spots are crowded by viewers most during autumn leaf seasons.
The National Parks contain the Japan’s most scenic mountains and seas. While the Parks feature both preserving almost intact ecosystems and offering the enjoyment of accessible scenic delicate sites nearby residential areas. Whether you head out on foot to the mountains, immerse yourself in the wilderness of deep woods and hidden steams, seek for a grandeur scenery, or enjoy wildlife viewing, Japan’s finest views will be revealed. Use information services and guides available in the visitor centers and other park facilities for your full enjoyment.

Visitor centers are the park facilities introducing special qualities of natural objects and processes in the park, to assist visitors to understand better and enjoy the park. Park visitors can learn about the park’s scenic views and wildlife from the presentation of replicas, posters, diorama and videos. Real-time wildlife information, such as about blooming flowers and bear sightings, and information on the best hiking trails are also available. Use these free visitor centers to plan your activities and destinations in the National Parks.

Japan is a volcanic country, with hot springs all over the country. It has been a traditional recreation for the general public to bathe in hot springs out in the countryside, where they can enjoy scenic views and visit historical and cultural objects, temples and shrines. In old hot spring towns, rich nature and culture are preserved. The National Parks featuring volcanoes offer various types of hot springs and ways of the enjoyment. You can enjoy outdoor bathing while viewing snow, streams, oceans, and so on. Tourists may select their destinations depending on minerals dissolved in spring waters. Local foods and delicacy add more pleasure to the visitor’s enjoyment of hot springs.

National Park guide
Visitor Centers

1. Trekking in wetlands, Oze (Nikko NP)
2. Diving with a dolphin (Ogasawara NP)
3. Bird-watching (Joshinetsu-kogen NP)
4. Sea-kayaking (Iriomote NP)

Enjoy hot spring spas

1. An outdoor bath of Yuzu Hot Spring, famous for its white spring (Yoshino Hachiman NP)
2. Sanki Hot Spring, an underwater hot spring looking out at the Kasukabe Island (Shimanto NP)
3. A hot spring lodge surrounded by autumn leaves (Shikoku Hachiman NP)
4. Fumar from Uozen Hot Spring (Uozen-Amakusa NP)
5. Monkeys bathing in hot spring, Akiyukuni-yum-kuuen (Joshinetsu-kogen NP)
Honshu. A series of enormous bluffs stretching for about a chain of characteristic islands in the Shikoku area features several volcanoes, Mt. Aso has an extremely large caldera, while Mt. Kuju is a series of dome-shaped volcanoes. The grassy fields on their hilltops have been maintained by human activities, such as prescribed burning and cattle grazing.

Kuril Islands (Kuril-Okhotsk Islands) 51°N

The Kuril Islands, located between Japan and Russia, are a chain of islands that extend from the southern tip of the Japanese archipelago to the northern coast of Russia. They are a collection of volcanic islands, some of which are still active, and others that have been extinct for millions of years. The Kuril Islands are known for their diverse marine life, including humpback whales, which migrate to the surrounding ocean. The islands are also home to a rich array of flora and fauna, with a variety of plant and animal species, including rare birds and reptiles.

N. Satsuma Peninsula (Shimabara Peninsula) 33°N

The Shimabara Peninsula is located in the southern part of Kyushu Island, Japan. It is known for its rich natural scenery, including vast wetlands, forests, and mountains. The peninsula is home to a variety of plant and animal species, including rare birds and reptiles, and is a popular destination for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts.

The National Park System

The National Park System aims at protecting the scenery that represents the Japanese natural beauty and leaving them unimpaired for future generations. Within the National Parks, while activities to cause environmental impacts are regulated under the law, the improvement of park facilities, such as trails and visitor centers, and rehabilitation of degraded areas are conducted. Currently, 28 sites are designated as the National Parks, covering 2,065 million hectares or 5.4% of the country's ground surface. Designation and management of National Parks are administered by the Ministry of the Environment. The Ministry's staffs who are called 'parkers' work on field management in each of the National Parks. The Japan’s National Parks contain local public and semi-public lands, many of which are often used for forestry and other purposes. Therefore, the partnership among the central and local governments and local people is important in the operation of the National Park system.