7. Promotion of Communication with Nature

Communication with nature gives people peace of mind and delight. It also plays a significant role in promoting better understanding of nature and in fostering attitudes of environmental stewardship.

The Ministry of the Environment develops many activities to promote communication with nature, and provide sites for people to experience diverse nature.

7.1 Establishment of Sites for the Promotion of Communication with Nature in Natural Parks

(1) Natural Park Facility Development and Maintenance Program

In a wide variety of locations, such as National Parks and Quasi-National Parks, the Ministry of the Environment has been working to provide people with opportunities to learn about and experience nature. The Ministry has also been working to establish facilities to conserve and restore the natural environment. The basic goals of these activities are to provide good communication with nature and to ensure coexistence with nature.

This program was initiated in 1994, introducing a new type of public works projects that are closely related to people's livelihoods, and the Ministry has worked hard to promote these projects.

The principles underlie all the projects of this program include: "promotion of communication with nature", "safe and pleasant use", "conservation and restoration of nature" and "multi-dimensional consideration" (people, nature, Earth-friendly, etc.).



Chubu Sangaku National Park Kamikochi Visitor Center



Oze National Park Ozegahara

(2) Development and Maintenance of National Park Facility

Development and maintenance of National Park facilities are implemented by either the national government or the local governments. However, the Ministry of the Environment set priority and directly manages the followings; ①projects in Special Protection Zones or Class I Special Zones that are the core areas of National Parks, ②projects in Facility Complexes that are bases for visitor use, and ③specially required projects such as nature restoration project. Also, the ministry has been conducting conservation programs to improve the habitat environment of wildlife in the national wildlife protection areas since 2007.

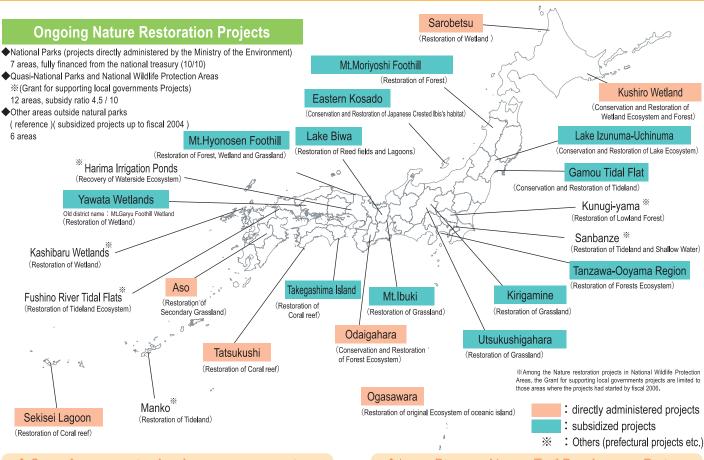


Rebunrishirisarobetsu National Prak Horonobuenti

(3) Development and Maintenance of Quasi-National Park Facility

Development and maintenance of Quasi-National Park facilities are implemented by the local governments. The national government has supported the local governments in facility development and maintenance projects by providing subsidy. In 2005, the national government established a new grant for supporting local governments, and now, the related projects are supported by this grant.

This grant for supporting local governments supports not only the facility development projects in Quasi-National Parks but also Long-Distance Nature Trail Projects (outside National or Quasi-National Parks).

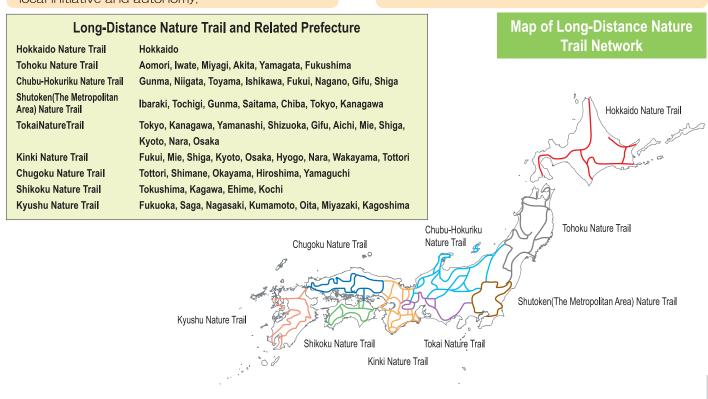


Grant for supporting local governments projects

This grant is a subsidy to support implementation of the projects based on the facility development and maintenance plan prepared by the prefectural governments. This grant is provided to the prefectural governments in a lump sum, and each prefectural government decides its allocation at their own discretion. Compared to the previous subsidy, this system promotes the local initiative and autonomy.

◆Long-Distance Nature Trail Development Projects

Long-distance nature trails form a nationwide network of nature paths, and the trails will allow you to go on a safe, easy and enjoyable walk along scenic areas all the year round. Walking along a trail will give you the opportunity to communicate with diverse natural environments, appreciate local history and culture, and foster a healthy mind and body.



Four Viewpoints of Facility Development and Maintenance Programs

Restoration of nature

Facility development and maintenance program is intended to restore degraded mountain trails and surrounding vegetation, and to protect vegetation from herbivores, such as sika deer.



Boardwalk to protect vegetation from being trampled Numahara Garden, Nikko National Park, Tochigi)

Vegetation restoration

In alpine areas, where climatic conditions are harsh, it takes a long time for vegetation to recover, if at all, once original vegetation is lost. Hikers trample vegetation along some hiking trails and heavy foot traffic can cause erosion where slopes are steep. Restoring vegetation in alpine areas is a high priority. For this reason, the Ministry of the Environment conducts the minimal infrastructure improvements necessary to protect sensitive vegetation and restore degraded areas.



Deer eating the bark of a tree

Deer barrier (showing the gate) (Odayohara Vegetation Restoration Facility, Nikko National Park, Tochigi)

Protection and restoration of alpine vegetation (Daisen Summit Vegetation Restoration Facility, Daisen-Oki National Park, Tottori)

Impact of over-abundant herbivores

Wildlife populations can increase when the natural balance in ecosystems is disturbed. Such wildlife can exert serious pressures on vegetation. The Ministry of the Environment attempt Various measures to prevent damage from herbivores.

Pleeasant use

The Ministry of the Environment is working to provide more pleasant environments for visitors by improving the quality of visitor facilities, such as toilets and walking trails, and through refurbishment of Facility Complexes in Natural Parks.

Refurbishment of camping sites

Old or outdated camping sites are refurbished to meet the contemporary needs. Traditionally, groups and mountaineers have used camping sites. Visitation pattern has been diversified due to recent increase in family use. The functions and facilities needed for camping sites have thus diversified greatly. Sanitary buildings equipped with toilets and showers and camping sites with car-parking spaces are being developed, taking into account impacts on nature and user's trends.



Refurbished sanitary building (Nyuto-sanroku Hot Springs Camping site, Towada-Hachimantai tional Park, Akita)



Clean and easy-to-use kitchen (Ohara Dam Camping site, Suzuka Quasi-National Park, Shiga)

National Park, Tottori)



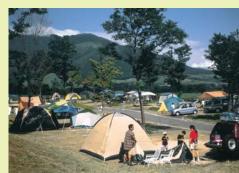
Refurbished restrooms (Chazonobara, Daisen-O

Facility development and maintenance program targets visitor centers as starting point for people's communication with



nature, and trails, for safe and pleasant nature education.

Sounkyo Visitor Center, Daisetsuzan National Park, Hokkaido



Hiruzen Camping Site, Daisen-Oki National Park, Okayama



Communication with nature

Unzen Suwanoike Visitor Center, Unzen-Amakusa National Park, Nagasaki

Timber-paved parking lot

Multi-dimensional consideration

Facility development takes into consideration multiple issues, such as nature, the global environment, and users.

Taking advantage of natural energy

In the construction of buildings, various technologies are integrated to utilize natural





(Tanukiko Country Nature School. Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, Shizuoka Wheelchair-accessible boardwalk Rengenuma, Bandai-Asahi National Park, Fukushima

isitor Center that uses sunlight Yokoyama Visitor Center, Ise-Shima National Park, Mie)

27

(4) Other Facilities

① National Park Resort Villages

National Park Resort Villages are recreational complexes developed in harmony with nature in appropriate places of outstanding nature in National and Quasi-National Parks.

Complexes are composed of various facilities for visitors to enjoy the nature of an area at its best, such as comfortable accommodation at moderate rates. Development started in 1961 and 36 National Park Resort Villages have been established to date.

Among the facilities in National Park Resort Villages, national and local authorities develop public facilities such as picnic sites, walking trails, and camping sites. The National Park Resort Villages of Japan develops and manages fee-for-services facilities, including accommodation and ski lifts.



Urabandai National Resort Village, Bandai-Asahi National Park

2 Hot Springs

Japan is one of the world's major hot spring nations, and hot springs play a very important role as resorts for people's health and relaxation. As of March 2007, there were 28,090 hot spring sources throughout the country (5,097 naturally flowing, 14,108 equipped with pumping systems, and 8,885 not in use). The total hot water from these sources amounts to approximately 4.03 million tons per day.

To conserve these hot springs, prevent disasters caused by flammable natural gas released during excavation or extraction of hot springs, seek proper utilization of these hot springs, we have the "Hot Springs Law". On the basis of this law, the Minister of the Environment gives the designation of "Hot Spring Health Resorts" to hot springs of good quality. As of March 2008, 91 sites, covering 16,652.75ha, had been designated.

In April, 2007, a partial amendment of the law was made to require that hot spring business operators carry out an analysis of ingredients of hot springs on a regular basis, and update the notice of ingredients of hot springs, etc. In the following November, in view of an explosion accident of flammable natural gas, another amendment was carried to review the criteria for granting permission for excavation of hot springs, and to create a approval system concerning the extraction of hot springs.



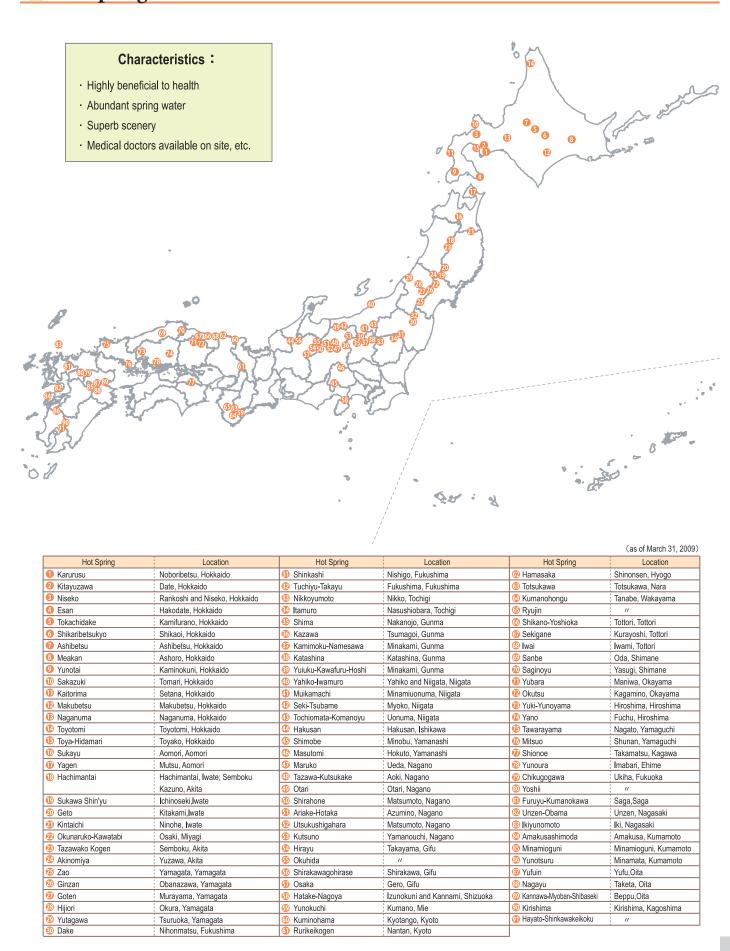
Hot Spring Health Resort "Shima-Onsen", Gumma



Nature Contact Hot Spring Center, "Kintaichi-Onsen", Iwate



Hot Spring Health Resort



7.2 Promotion of Activities for Communication with Nature

The Ministry of the Environment conducts the following measures to provide people with communication with nature so that they may acquire a better understanding of and more sensitivity toward nature. It is expected that these measures will encourage people to actively and voluntarily engage in conservation of the natural environment.

(1) Provision of Opportunities for Communication with Nature

Visitor's bases in National Parks, such as visitor centers and nature schools, provide visitors with interpretation, and various programs and activities to experience nature and to promote a better understanding of nature.

In addition, April 15-May 14 of each year is designated as "Green Month", July 21-August 20 as "Campaign to Communication with Nature", and October as the "Month for Nature Trail Walking". Many events, such as nature observation, take place nationwide during these periods. The Ministry also calls for each prefecture to initiate events that provide opportunities for people to have communication with nature.

The Ministry of the Environment organizes "National Nature Park Conference" every year. In this conference, the ministry honors those who have contributed to the promotion of natural parks with a commendation from the Environment Minister, holds a symposium on ecotourism takes participants on an onsite eco-tour program and provides other programs. This event aims at deepening people's understanding of nature, promoting sustainable use of natural parks and fostering respect for nature. Children are also given opportunities to experience nature and to learn the importance of the environment and the spirit of contributing to society. Junior Park Ranger Programs in National Parks across the country provide opportunities for children to experience the jobs of the nature conservation officers (the "Rangers"), such as patrolling, promoting visitor's etiquette, and conducting research on nature.



(2) Training Personnel to Support Communication with Nature

1 Training Personnel to Support Nature Experience

Interaction with nature can help children grow up in a healthy way, and develop sensitivity towards nature, so that they learn to take appropriate action to environmental issues. Activities in nature "through the five senses" will become fundamental

experience for children's personal growth and (the formation of) their environmental awareness. Therefore, the Ministry of the Environment is conducting training programs for those who support nature experience.



I get close naturally

2 Encouragement of Volunteer Activities

In recent years, increasing numbers of people are eager to contribute directly to nature conservation. In National and Quasi-National Parks, there are about 3,000 Natural Park Advisers, at the request of the Director-General of the Nature Conservation Bureau, actively participating in instructing visitors on etiquette in the parks. "Park Volunteers", recruited from the general public by Regional Environment Office, assist the Offices in offering nature interpretation. Currently, about 1,800 people are registered as park volunteers in 25 National Parks around the country, and are taking an active part in cleanup campaigns and interpretation activities.

(3) Provision of Information

The Ministry of the Environment works to establish networks among nature lovers and providers of nature activities. It disseminates information on nature-related events via, for example, the internet in Ministry of the Environment homepage ("Nature Lovers Club").



"Nature Lovers Club" (http://www.env.go.jp/nature/nats/)

7.3 Promotion of Ecotourism

The ministry of the Environment defines ecotourism as tourism to experience and understand the natural environment, history and culture that are unique to the area, and to be responsible for their conservation. Practice of ecotourism in the area contributes to:environment conservation by protecting local natural environment and cultural resources; promotion of tourism by creating more demand for tourism; revitalization of the local community by ensuring job security; and also utilization as a place for environmental education is expected. To implement ecotourism, it is necessary to have cooperation among tourists, travel agencies, local residents and a variety of local industries.

Efforts to promote ecotourism by the Ministry of the Environment

(1) Ecotourism Promotion Measures

To promote and establish ecotourism, the ministry, in accordance with the proposals from the "Conference on Promoting Ecotourism", an advisory body of experts, has been implementing the following five promotion measures since 2004.

1 Ecotourism Charter

Ecotourism Charter was formulated to promote the principles of ecotourism in a comprehensible form.

2 List of Ecotour

The website of the Ministry of the Environment that provides the information of ecotour programs nationwide. (http://ecotourism.ip/)

(3) Ecotourism Award

The Minister of the Environment will give an award to excellent activities in which ecotourism operators and communities organizing ecotourism focus on natural environment or the development of local communities.

4 Manual for Promoting Ecotourism

The ministry has compiled a manual and made it available on its website for those promoting ecotourism in their local communities. It will instruct you in the basic method or some important points of promoting ecotourism.

(http://www.env.go.jp/nature/ecotourism/manual.html)

⑤ Model Projects

The Ministry of Environment supported 13 model sites that futuristically worked on ecotourism (FY2004-2006). Since 2007, it has started support projects to promote appropriate operation of ecotourism at the Natural World Heritage sites and the candidate sites for the Heritage.





wshoe experience A canoe experience

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(2) Other Promotion Measures

Besides these five promotion measures, the Ministry of the Environment, in accordance with the Ecotourism Promotion Law, which was established and now is in force, has been implementing other measures such as raising public awareness by organizing symposiums, offering support based on the law to regions that operate ecotourism, accumulating know-how about ecotourism and developing human resources in an integrated manner. These measures are aimed at further promotion of ecotourism by helping ecotourism operators take advantage of regional characteristics while ensuring the conservation of natural environment.

Establishment of the Ecotourism Promotion Law

The Ecotourism Promotion Law, which defines the comprehensive framework for ecotourism activities that are promoted in local areas, was passed and established in June, 2007, and came into effect in April, 2008. In the following June, "the Basic Policies for Promotion of Ecotourism", which the government had formulated based on the Ecotourism Promotion Law was approved by the Cabinet (meeting).

The Conference on Promotion of Ecotourism organized by municipalities will make a grand design according to the Ecotourism Promotion Law, and the ensuing government's approval of the grand design will make the following actions possible.

1 Conservation of natural tourism resources

By designating those resources as specified natural tourism resources, the municipalities can take protective measures to prohibit staining and damaging (certain) natural tourism resources, and behaviors disturbing to (other) tourists in the area where they are located.

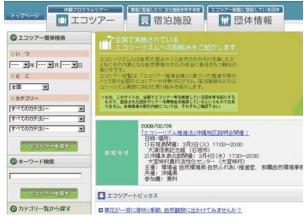
2 Entrance restriction

The municipalities can restrict the number of people entering the area where specified natural tourism resources are located if necessary.

3 Public relations

The government will publicize ecotourism programs promoted in the approved region nationwide.

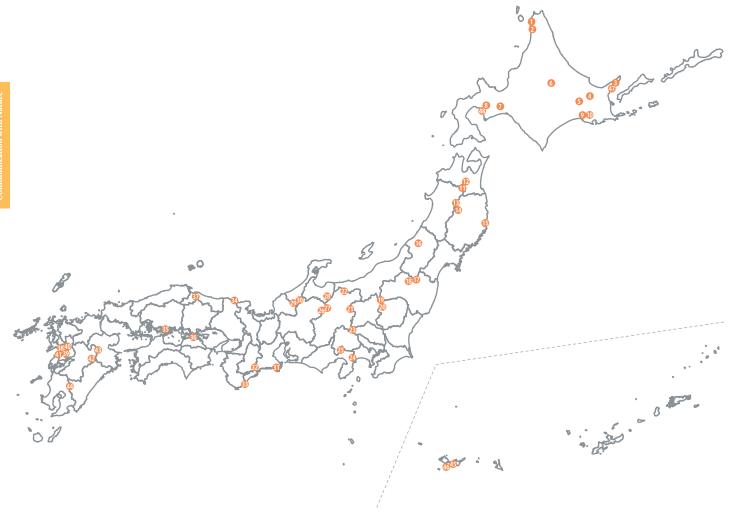
※Natural tourism resources involves fauna and flora, their
habitats and traditional cultures of local communities in the
destinations of ecotourism.



"Comprehensive List of Ecotour" Website http://ecotourism.jp/



MOE Visitor Centers in National Parks



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National Park	Visitor Center	Location	National Park	Visitor Center	Location
Rishiri-Rebun-Sarobetsu	Sarobetsu Natural Flower Garden country school	Toyotomi, Hokkaido	Chubusangaku	6 Kamikochi Visitor Center	Matsumoto, Nagano
Rishiri-Rebun-Sarobetsu	2 Horonobe Visitor Center	Horonobe, Hokkaido	Chubusangaku	Kamikochi Infomation Center	Matsumoto, Nagano
Shiretoko	3 Rausu Visitor Center (old)	Rausu, Hokkaido	Chubusangaku	Tateyama Center	Tateyama Toyama
Akan	4 Kawayu Eco-museum Center	Teshikaga, Hokkaido	Hakusan	Ichinose Visitor Center	Hakusan, Ishikawa
Akan	Akan Lakeside Eco-museum Center	Kushiro, Hokkaido	Hakusan	Chugu-Onsen Visitor Center	Hakusan, Ishikawa
Daisetsuzan	6 Sounkyo Visitor Center	Kamikawa, Hokkaido	Ise-Shima	Yokoyama Visitor Center	Shima, Mie
Shikotsu-Toya	Shikotsu Lake Visitor Center	Chitose, Hokkaido	Yoshino-Kumano	Odaigahara Visitor Center	Kamikitayama, Nara
Shikotsu-Toya	Toya-Takarada Nature Experience House	Toyako, Hokkaido	Yoshino-Kumano	3 Ugui Visitor Center	Nachikatsuura Wakayama
Kushiroshitsugen	Onnenai Visitor Center	Tsurui, Hokkaido	San'inkaigan	Takeno Snorkel Center Visitor Center	Toyooka, Hyogo
Kushiroshitsugen	Lake Toro Eco-Museum Center	Shibecha, Hokkaido	Setonaikai	Okunoshima Visitor Center	Takehara, Hiroshima
Towada-Hachimantai	1 Towada Visitor Center	Towada, Aomori	Setonaikai	60 Gosikidai Visitor Center	Sakaide, Kagawa
Towada-Hachimantai	12 Tsuta Onsen Visitor Center	Towada, Aomori	Daisen-Oki	Daisen Infomation Center	Daisen, Tottori
Towada-Hachimantai	Hachimantai Visitor Center	Kazuno, Akita	Unzen-Amakusa	Unzen Mountain Infomation Center annex	Unzen, Nagasaki
Towada-Hachimantai	4 Amihari Visitor Center	Shizuisi, Iwate		(Unzen Park Visitor Center)	
Rikuchukaigan	Miyako Visitor Center	Miyako, Iwate	Unzen-Amakusa	Unzen Mountain Infomation Center	Unzen, Nagasaki
Bandai-Asahi	1 Tsukiyama Visitor Center	Tsuruoka, Yamagata	Unzen-Amakusa	Heisei Shinzan Nature Center	Shimabara, Nagasaki
Bandai-Asahi	Jododaira Visitor Center	Fukushima, Fukushima	Unzen-Amakusa	1 Unzen Suwa-pond Visitor Center	Unzen, Nagasaki
Bandai-Asahi	Urabandai Visitor Center	Kitashiobara, Fukushima	Aso-Kuju	10 Minami-Aso Visitor Center	Takamori, Kumamoto
Nikko	Ozenuma Visitor Center	Hinoeki-, Fukushima	Aso-Kuju	49 Chojahara Visitor Center	Kokonoe, Oita
Nikko	Nikko-Yumoto Visitor Center	Nikko, Tochigi	Kirishima-Yaku	49 Ebino Eco-museum Center	Ebino, Miyazaki
Joshin'etsukogen	4 Kazawa Infomation Center	Tsumagoi, Gunma	Iriomote-Ishigaki	45 Taketomi Yuga-kan	Taketomi, Okinawa
Joshin'etsukogen	Kasagamine Mini-Visitor Center	Myoko, Niigata	Iriomote-Ishigaki	65 Kuroshima Visitor Center	Taketomi, Okinawa
Chichibu-Tama-Kai	Mokiba Mini-Visitor Center	Kawakami, Nagano	Shiretoko	Rausu Visitor Center (new)	Rausu, Hokkaido
Fuji-Hakone-Izu	4 Hakone Visitor Center	Hakone, Kanagawa	Shikotsu-Toya	Lake Toya Visitor Center	Toyako, Hokkaido
Fuji-Hakone-Izu	45 Lake Tanuki Nature School	Fujinomiya, Shizuoka			