**Ise-Shima National Park**

*Keeping the Ama Culture Alive from Prehistoric Japan*

At Ise-Shima National Park, the Ama female diver culture has long flourished around faith and the beautiful blessings of the sea. Ama diving is a distinct method of catching seafood by free diving deep beneath the water’s surface. The constantly flowing warm waters of the Kumano Current help create the rich marine environment on the jagged north coastlines of Ise-Shima. Ama fishing has a long history stretching back thousands of years. Shell mounds and abalone, as well as tools made from processed antlers thought to be used for catching seafood, have been discovered dating back to the Jomon Period (14,000-1,000 BC) and Yayoi Period (1,000 BC–300 AD).

A range of marine products, such as abalone, oysters, and seaweed were historically presented as sacred offerings to the Ise Jingu Shrine and Imperial Court. Ama female divers follow several rules—such as restrictions on the fishing season and the size of shellfish that can be harvested—to prevent overfishing and allow people to continue to enjoy nature’s blessings. It is precisely this kind of environmentally friendly fishing that makes the Ama female diver culture all the more relevant in today’s world.

**Experience the Ama Female Diver Culture**

+ Dive into the waters of Ise-Shima with ama divers who embody a 3,000-year tradition!
+ Interacting with real ama divers in a traditional ama hat (AMA hat HACHIMAN)

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**Nikko National Park**

*Holy Ground of Mountain Worship*

While the World Heritage Site shrines and temples of Nikko are the most famous among the places within Nikko National Park, the area’s relation with faith and nature is as well known. In Nikko, mountain worship has a long history said to have begun in 766 when the monk Shodo Shinran founded Shuryuji Temple (the current Eihoji Temple) near the present site of the shrines and temples of Nikko.

The following year, Futarasan Shrine was built with Mt. Nantai (Kantai-san, also called Futarasan) as the object of worship. About 15 years later, when Shodo Shinran climbed to the top of Mt. Nantai, he established Futarasan Shrine Okumiyagi (true shrine) at the summit, as well as the Futarasan Shrine Chogupu—and later on the Chuzanji Temple—near Lake Chuzan at the foot of the mountain. Since then many Buddhist monks have traveled deep into the mountains of Nikko to purify themselves of worldly desires, engage in ascetic practice, and learn about the spiritual power of nature that led to Nikko’s prosperity as a sacred place for mountain worship. Come and immerse yourself in the solemnity of the shrines and temples of Nikko and the sacred atmosphere of the nature in Okumiyagi.

**Experience the Nature, Culture, and Way of Life in Nikko**

- Discover Nikko Mountain Bike Tour

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**Journey through Japan’s Culture and History at National Parks**

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**Akan-Mashu National Park**

*Ainu Culture and Perspective on Nature*

Since ancient times, the Ainu people have been living within the grounds of the Akan-Mashu National Park. To the Ainu, nature is the source of bountiful blessings. The people believe that kamuy, spiritual beings, reside in many things in the natural world such as flora and fauna, natural phenomena, and even in the rivers and winds. By paying respect to these beings, the people strive to live in harmony with nature. Their garments and accessories feature unique patterns believed to ward off evil spirits. Intricate embroidery of a different cloth is used on the collars and cuffs, creating a distinct sense of beauty and culture.

At Akan Aian Kottan village, visitors can experience the Ainu culture through seeing traditional dances and garments, and by having a glimpse of the people’s way of life. The modern world makes it easy to forget the value of nature, but being immersed in the culture of the Ainu can lead to great learning and realization.

- Experience the Ainu Culture
  - Kamuy LUMINA: a night walk through Lake Akan’s woods
  - Kamuy at Akan Aian Theater <Ikor>

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**Daisen-Oki National Park**

*Caverns of Myths and Mysteries*

From ages past, the Japanese people were said to worship all things in nature as gods reside in them. The Daisen-Oki National Park area—particularly the Izumo Oyashiro (Izumo Grand Shrine)—is said to be the setting for some of Japan’s mythological stories. Fragments of myth are scattered throughout. Along Shimane Peninsula’s beautiful coastline, visitors can come across Kakano Kukedo caverns with an especially mysterious atmosphere. Formed by many years of erosion, New Kukedo (God’s Kukedo) is a 40m-tall 290m-long cave facing the sea. It is known as the birthplace of one of the gods. Sightseeing boats pass through here. Old Kukedo (Buddha Kukedo) is said to be the place where children’s souls gather, called Sai no Kawara (Literally a riverbed in the underworld) where there are countless moss-covered stone towers. Such myths are still passed on today. Around the summer solstice, the golden glitter of light from the morning sun passes right through the cavern, making this place popular as a spot flowing with mystical power.

Have a once-in-a-lifetime experience that brings to mind the values and spirituality of the Japanese people who never fail to express appreciation for everything.