Enjoy the Seasons at National Parks!
Seasonal Scenery Special

Spring
Enriching the Earth: Arrival of “Urizen”

From around March to April, the weather over the islands becomes more stable, marking the season of urizen (early summer in Okinawan). Visiting the Kerama Islands is a treat in itself as you feel the pleasant sea breeze from on board a boat and take in the captivating colors of nature through leaves tinted deep green, flowers painted in vivid hues, and the beautiful, exceptionally clear Kerama Blue seas.

Come mid-April, the beaches officially open. Dive into the sea, and underneath the waves, to see the many kinds of coral and sea creatures gathering under the sunlight that pierces the water, seemingly taking delight in the arrival of spring.

A popular activity in Kerama during winter is whale watching, as humpback whales come to the warmer seas down south to breed and raise their calves. Visitors can also catch a glimpse of these gentle giants when they head back north.

Summer
Blessings from Winds over the Caldera

Mt. Aso features one of the world’s largest calderas formed by pyroclastic flow, and in summer the volcano’s bountiful blessings are brought forth. After the fields are burned in spring, fresh new buds can be seen in the grasslands in summer. At Kuasenri—grass-covered plains where cows and horses can be seen grazing—visitors can feel the refreshing breeze of early summer. This scenic spot also offers views of the smoke rising from Mt. Aso’s Nakadake crater.

This panorama of people living alongside the Mt. Aso caldera has remained almost unchanged for more than a thousand years. Making full use of what nature provides, the locals turned the rich, vast lands farmed by Mt. Aso into pastures for Akushu cattle, as well as other cows and horses, and cultivated and maintained Japanese pampas grass used to make thatched roofs for houses. This rich, valuable ecosystem continues to be protected through the efforts taken by residents from ages ago.

Autumn
Valley Nestled in a Golden Beech Forest

As autumn draws near around the Oirase Stream, which flows quietly through beech forests, the greens of summer are transformed into vibrant reds and yellows as far as the eye can see. Temperatures in the morning and evening drop beginning in mid-September. It is these cooler temperatures that bring about the beautiful color changes of the foliage starting in October. Many people come to see the sights and the best time to visit is until mid-November.

It’s tempting to look overhead all the time and gaze at the marvelous foliage, but it’s also enjoyable to look on the ground where colored leaves cover the walkway, seemingly creating a wonderful tunnel of autumn seen only during this season in Oirase Stream.

From the serenity of the flowing water, moss-covered rocks, and waterfalls to the banks almost hidden by beech trees and places deeper in the forest where foliage is steeped in golden hues, this gorge looks like a work of art that surely captivates the heart.

Winter
Living Alongside Volcanoes

From Kagoshima, a city of 600,000 people, a view of Sakurajima can be seen right before your eyes. This volcano sits on the calm Kinoko Bay and continues to send out plumes of smoke every now and then. Here, many people live their lives with appreciation for the blessings provided by an active volcano, a rare spectacle in the world. Around Sakurajima, December is the time for harvesting Sakurajima komikan, small, sweet oranges cultivated in the warm seaside temperatures amid soil rich in volcanic ash. January and February are the months for Sakurajima daikon, a variety of radish that’s large, juicy, and recognized by Guinness World Records as the world’s largest radish variety.

Kinoko Bay, where the island of Sakurajima is located in a giant caldera sea. Previous eruptions have had great influence on the culture and people’s way of life. Industries such as agriculture and fishing, as well as the local food culture, proceeded to thrive while also overcoming the problems wrought by frequent eruptions and volcanic ash. Visitors can enjoy the region’s unique ocean culture as the scenery is dotted with hot springs of various quality. Sand baths that make use of geothermal energy and cooking apparatuses using natural volcanic steam from fumarole can also be found.

Experience Kerama Blue
- Snorkeling with sea turtles in a dream world of the Kerama Blue and coral reef
- A walking tour of a two-star Michelin island while admiring the Kerama Blue

Asaro-Kuju National Park

- Spiritual activity in the Aso Caldera; yoga in the skies (limited to particular seasons)
- Helicopter tour of Mt. Aso; feel the power of nature
- Horse riding with the magnificent Five Mountains of Aso and the Kuju Mountain Range in the background

Around Mt. Aso
- Make your very own natural spring footbath in a secluded hot-spring area on the coast of Mt. Sakurajima
- Learn about how people coexist with one of the world’s most famous active volcanoes on this mini trekking tour of the lava plains
- Sakurajima Volcano Guided Walk Tour—for the earth underneath your feet
- Sakurajima radish harvesting and a lunch featuring Sakurajima radish; enjoy the bounties of the active volcano Mt. Sakurajima

Around Oirase Stream
- A relaxed walking nature tour with a focus on the area’s diverse mosses
- Deep Oirase Gorge walking tour with a focus on moss
- Comprehensive Oirase Gorge Nature Walk

Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park

- Make your very own natural spring footbath in a secluded hot-spring area on the coast of Mt. Sakurajima