

Hiking the Northern Alps

Chubusangaku National Park welcomes hikers to a majestic alpine landscape of towering peaks, snowy slopes, clear mountain streams, and diverse seasonal varieties of plant and animal life. The park offers a well-developed system of trails and mountain huts and challenging routes. It is home to 10 of Japan's 21 peaks over 3,000 meters. The tallest is Mt. Okuhotakadake, the third-highest mountain in Japan at 3,190 meters, and the most recognizable is Mt. Yarigatake, whose 3,180 meter peak is said to resemble the Matterhorn. Mt. Tsubakurodake, at 2,763 meters, is popular with novice hikers. Most of the summits are accessible, depending on one's level of expertise, the time of year, and the weather

The following is a guide to hiking the mountains of the national park. Hikers are urged to check the latest trail and weather conditions thoroughly and gather as much information as possible before setting out. The local tourist associations are reliable sources of information, as are the local visitor centers. Hiking guides, some of them multilingual, can make the experience more enjoyable by providing with you local customs, route information, safety hints and knowledge of the natural environment.

About Trails

The Northern Alps routes are divided into hiking routes suitable for hikers and mountaineering routes. The hiking routes marked on the map that are suitable for hikers in the snow-free season (roughly July through September) are laid as trails, with signposts in places such as junctions that indicate present location and destination. On mountaineering routes other than the hiking routes, special equipment such as ropes are essential, and it is dangerous for ordinary hikers to proceed. Take care not to enter a trail that is over your ability level.

The main hiking routes are graded by the level of difficulty in 5 ratings from A to E (refer to the attached map). There are some hiking routes that use chains and ladders to ascend and descend steep rocky places, and the use of helmets is recommended on those routes.

Popular hiking routes can get crowded and jammed with hikers, particularly during high season in the summer and in weekends.



Geography and Geology The great, U-shaped valleys of these mountains,

The Northern Alps are one of three mountain ranges that divide the main island of Honshu. They were formed between 2 to 5 million years ago during the Pliocene epoch, when compression between tectonic plates resulted in a thrust-fault from the east, pushing the earth's crust skyward and forming this long series of mountains.

Besides volcanic and sedimentary rocks, many of the mountains here consist of granite pierced by crystalline rocks containing feldspar and quartz. Granite is created when magma cools and solidifies at a considerable depth below the earth's surface. The granite here is some of the newest in the world: for example, while most of Japan's granite was



Mt. Tsubakurodake with its beautiful granite forms

Enjoying

the Flora and Fauna

and animal life, some of which is indigenous to

trum, or kobaikeiso, is a toxic flowering plant

blossoms. It is found in areas of damp soil and

ognizable by its straight stems with multiple

Japanese rowan's name, nanakamado, is made

f two words meaning "seven" and "oven," from the

ief that it is such a slow-burning firewood it can be

d in an oven seven times. Also known as mountain

t bears small white flowers in spring, followed by

wy fields which symbolizes arrival of early

mer. It blooms in one place after another as the

melts and the ground is exposed, and since it

ns in short period of time, about 1 to 2 weeks, its

ring tells of the progress of snow melting . After

the flowers stop blooming, the pale pink spikes fly

go)'s windmills(kazaguruma), and so the name Chin-

in the fall, so it can be enjoyed in 3 different forms.

Although looking like a grass, it is actually a tree.

guruma was given. The leaves also turn color vividly

away in the wind. The sight resembles of

ms every few years in midsummer

Japanese Rowan (Sorbus commista)

nt red berries and leaves in autumr

nguruma (Geum pentapetalum; avens)

Hikers will come across all kinds of plant

Trees and Other Plants

The trees and other plant species that populate

the forests of Chubusangaku National Park

vary by area and altitude.

or found only in Japan.

formed 50 to 130 million years ago, the age of this range's granite is under 5 million years.

such as the one on the face of Mt. Yarigatake, were gouged out by glaciers during the most recent ice age that ended some 10,000 years ago. Further weathering by glaciers, rivers, and avalanches created steep slopes, leaving the mountain peaks sharp and ragged. The faces of the mountains also eroded, leaving many rocks and boulders of all shapes and sizes that dot the landscape and are used to mark the hiking trails.

The most famous active volcano in the Northern Alps is Mt. Yakedake (whose name in Japanese means "burning mountain"), at the entrance of Kamikochi. The region's many old volcanoes have contributed a rich legacy of geothermal springs, a source of great pleasure for tired hikers who soak in the steaming mineral waters.



shishiudo in Japan, this is a native plant with

cate white blossoms resembling fireworks that

panese beech, or buna, is a deciduous tree native

ability to absorb and store rainwater in its trunk and

s helps prevent erosion, and the evaporation of wa-

hrough its leaves acts as a natural cooler and climate

fier. The tree's leaves turn yellow in autumn.

panese White Birch(Betula platyphylla)

white birch, or shirakaba, is found throughout

mountains at altitudes of around 1,500 meters

can be recognized by its white, flaky bark and

e-green leaves that turn golden yellow in autumn.

nse fields of Siberian dwarf pine (haimatsu) can

e found at high altitudes near the tree line through-

t the park, creating a safe haven for the Japanese

Japanese larch, or karamatsu, is the only de-

to leaf early in spring, and its needles turn bright

pink flowers bloom in gravely granite where

er plants cannot live. The sight of its flowers no-

ame of "Queen of the alpine flora." The name

akusa (horse plant) is derived from the resem-

nce to a face of a horse. Parsley-like thin leaves

send water directly to its own roots by changing

ooming in this harsh environment has earned

Siberian Dwarf Pine (Pinus pumila)

Japanese Larch(Larix kaempferi)

ow before being shed in autumn.

omakusa (Dicentra peregrina)

moisture in the air into water droplets.

an and can grow at altitudes of up to 1,400 meters.

rge from its tall stems in July and August.

apanese Beech(Fagus crenata)

Taisho Pond was created by the eruption of Yakedake in 1915.

The Hiking Season

The best season for hiking runs from late July through early September, when temperatures range from 15°C to 25°C at lower altitudes and from 5°C to 15°C at higher altitudes. In earlier spring and autumn, lowest temperatures can reach below 0°C. Snow may fall in late September or early October at higher elevations. Winter comes to the mountains in late October, and the whole national park will be covered in snow until June.

Spring

Spring in the mountains begins at the end of April, usually around the holiday period known as Golden Week. Mountain lodges throughout the park begin opening their doors around that time as the melting snows allow. Since the higher peaks such as Mt. Yarigatake, Hotaka mountains, and Mt. Jonendake, are all still completely snow-covered in spring, winter equipment and experience are reguired to hike these mountains

Summe

Trail Condition to Expect

The rainy season usually starts in late June and lasts about a month, and there are few hikers during this time. After the rainy season,

A Historic View:

Climbing in the Birthplace of the

"Japanese Alps"

Modern alpinism in Japan began in the Chubu-

sangaku National Park with the arrival of European

mountaineers in the Meiji era (1868–1912). But as

in other regions of Japan, climbing in these moun-

tains has its roots in the country's indigenous re-

ligion, which deifies natural phenomena, including

mountain peaks. Some areas had already become

pilgrimage destinations or special sites where

The first ascent of Mt. Yarigatake, the center-

piece of the Northern Alps, was made in 1828 by

a Buddhist priest named Banryu. Besides ascetics,

the mountains were also the domain of woodcut-

ters and hunters, and one hunter named Kamijo Ka-

monji is now famed for guiding the first non-Japa-

nese climber, William Gowland, to the peak of Mt.

Yarigatake in 1877. Gowland was a British engineer

appears in his writings. owned by Jo-on-ji Temple

Portrait of Banryu,

Japanese Rock Ptarmigan (Lagopus muta)

no means "thunder bird") is a heavy-bodied ground

eeder about the size of a small chicken that is found

pure-white coloring during the winter. Its survival

n alpine areas of dwarf Siberian pine. It is noted for

at high altitudes made it a symbol of the mountain

humans, hikers spot them quite frequently.

Alpine Accentor (Prunella collaris)

deities, and for most of Japanese history raicho were

not hunted. Despite being a beloved bird, it is now on

the endangered list. Since the birds are accustomed to

With its streaked brown back, gray head and red-

n-brown spotted breast, the alpine accentor (iwahi-

etation. It can be found at elevations of over 2,000

eters but usually winters at lower altitudes, and is

own for its beautiful song, warbled while in flight.

ootted Nutcracker (Nucifraga caryocatactes)

spotted nutcracker, or hoshi-garasu, is a mem-

of the crow family and feeds on insects, nuts,

I pine cones. It is found in coniferous mountain

sts and has an excellent memory, remember-

hundreds of locations where it has buried food.

s distinct white-spotted pattern is elegant and

A matured bird is blackish-brown all over with gold-

en brown at the back of the head. The wingspan can

ach up to an impressive 2m. They look majestics as

ircle and fly on the rising airflow. Steep moun-

ous areas are its natural habitat, building nests

on rock ledges or in large trees. The decline of its

natural habitat and a fall in the breeding success rate

and a reduction in surviving numbers. Designated

as a a nationally endangered wildlife species under

threat of extinction, it will be precious experience if

Golden Eagle (Aquila chrysaetos)

ari in Japanese) is found in mountain areas with little

and archaeologist, one

of the many interna-

tional experts invit-

ed to Japan to help

with industrialization

during the Meiji era.

He was also an enthu-

siastic climber, and the

first use of the term

"the Japanese Alps"

Bird watchers will find the park

and nonmigratory species, including:

a habitat for migratory

Birds

priests underwent strenuous ascetic training.

alpine flowers of all varieties begin to make their appearance, presenting a colorful contrast with the remaining snow. In late July, mountains are snow free, and almost all trails can be accessible without any winter equipment. Summer is a good season with warm weather, but please be weather ready. Typhoons come often during this time, and thunderstorms can be a daily occurrence in the afternoons

Autumn

From late September through mid-October, the forests change from the lush greens of summer to their autumn colors. The change begins at the higher altitudes first, then it comes down slowly as it gets colder. Karasawa, a popular destination for visitors, is a famous spot for autumn leaves, but you can find spectacular views throughout the park. The dakekanba, or Erman's beech trees, are aglow with vivid yellows, while the most brilliant reds come from the leaves of the Japanese rowan. In October, temperatures can drop drastically and snow can fall

worst possible weather. During this period, snow makes the trails icy, which can easily lead to an accident This is also when the mountain lodges start preparing for winter.

even at lower elevations. Bring warm clothing and prepare for the

Some mountain lodges close their doors around mid-October.

At the beginning of November, almost all mountain lodges close for the season except Enzanso and Nishiho-sanso. After November 15th, all facilities around the bus terminal area close until the next spring comes in Kamikochi. Snowfall will see the majority of roads and trails are closed during the winter season throughout the entire national park. Only guides or experienced hikers will be able to ac-

Icy With Occasional Snow Snow Free

Walter Weston and Kamonji Kamijo

It was another British climber, a missionary

named Walter Weston, who introduced Japan's

mountains to the world. After climbing several of

the Northern Alps' peaks, he wrote a book titled

Mountaineering and Exploration in the Japanese

Alps, which was published in London in 1896.

Like his compatriot, he was guided by Kamonji, for

Mountaineering became an increasingly popular

activity as Europeans introduced alpine techniques

and climbing gear into the country. The Japanese

Alpine Club was founded in 1905, and the first uni-

versity alpine club was founded at Keio University

in 1915. The sport quickly spread all over the coun-

try, and peak after peak and route after route were

conquered by enthusiastic climbers. Today, thanks

to constant conservation efforts and the well-run

system of trails and huts, there are innumerable

Japanese Least Weasel (Mustela itatsi)

anese Serow(Capricornis crispus)

birds, like the rock ptarmigan.

d okojo in Japanese, this is one of the small-

mbers of the genus Mustela. While it looks

able when standing on its hind legs, this furry

ure is carnivorous and hunts small mammals

igh its Japanese name, kamoshika, includes

-toed bovine, a kind of goat-antelope. While not

anger of extinction, it is considered a symbol of

tika, which means deer, the Japanese serow is an

destinations for hikers.

The park is home to many creatures

great and small, protected through

Mammals

whom he expressed high praise in the book.

Icv With Occasional Snow

Icy With Occasional Snow

Snow Free Snow Coverd

What to Bring: Hiking Equipment



wool that will dry quickly. 2 Middle layer Long sleeved and moisturewicking shirt or sweater. 3 Backpack

Backpack size will depend on the length of the hike and whether you plan on carrying a tent. Putting he contents in plastic bags and using a rain cover for the pack is also

4 Hiking pants Lightweight, quick-dry materials that are easy to move in.

1 Base layer

Light synthetic fabric or

5 Hiking shoes High-top hiking boots with good ankle support and traction are best.





Map and Always carry a detailed map of

if you get disoriented.



Windproof and waterproof jacket with a hood and pants (breathable fabric recommended)

Avalanche Safety

To have a safe and enjoyable time hiking, please make sure to bring appropriate equipment and clothing. Doing so will makes your adventure more comfortable and decrease the risk of an accident. For a late spring, summer, and early autumn, the following items are required. These are only the basic items you should have with you. Additional items may be needed depending on your hiking plan.





Backpack

Hiking shirt

Hiking pants

Warm jacket

Hiking socks

Hiking equipment checklist

Quick-dry underwea

for early spring

the people hiking up.

Hiking boots Hat or cap

Additional items

Neck gaiter Insulated puffy jacket Insulated water bottle **Trekking poles**

Crampons

Ice axe

Hiking Tips

• On trails, hikers coming uphill have the right of way. If

• When a dislodged rock can endanger people below, hik-

rock"). Raku is pronounced much like the word "rock."

Stay on the trail. Stepping off trail can damage plants or

animal species and can hurt the ecosystems that surround

• Be aware of wildlife. You might see some wildlife while

you hike. Keep your distance from the wildlife you en-

• Stay informed. Get any updated information about trails

• Helmets are recommended for certain dangerous trails.

• The weather can change very quickly in the mountains.

or hazards in the park before starting your hike.

Be prepared and check forecasts often.

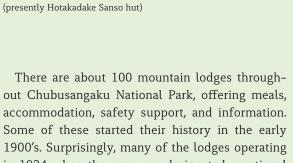
ers call out "Raku!" an abbreviation of rakuseki ("falling

you're descending the trail, step aside and give space to

A Tradition of Japan's Mountain Lodges



The first Hotaka hut was build in 1925





in 1934 when the area was designated a national park are still in operation today.

Until the advent of helicopters, food and any supplies were carried by *Bokka*, -people who carry items on their back - and their loads usually exceed their own body weight. If you have ever hiked with

lountain clinic opens during summer season at Yarigatake Sanso mountain lodge.

a heavy backpack, it's easy to imagine how difficult their job was. Now, thanks to helicopter deliveries and generators, guests can enjoy things like hot meals, beer, and even ice cream in some locations.

Every lodge has a deep connections with its area. The managers and their employees are walking encyclopedias who share their knowledge about the nature, trails, weather conditions, and much more. Most mountain lodges are family-run businesses and have lasted for generations, and they have built and taken care of the trails that hikers walk.

Bring a headlamp on any hike, even short day hikes. • As a legal requirement, the hiking itineraries should be submitted at the trailhead or online in advance.



out to each other can help you pass in a safe place

mark trails.

The Northern Alps Mountain Range; Rules for Visitors

In 1934, the Northern Alps were designated as the Chubusangaku National Park. Japan's national parks are designated by law for the protection and promotion of the country's world-class scenic areas. In order to maintain a balance between enjoyment and preservation of the natural environment, development has been kept to a minimum. In such a unique and rich natural environment, accidents can occur as a result of natural disasters and contact with wild animals. Several associated organizations strive toward the reduction of accidents. However, as the park remains a wilderness area, accidents cannot be eliminated by the efforts of park authorities alone. For the safe enjoyment and continued protection of the Northern Alps, we ask all climbers to abide by the following rules when entering mountainous areas of the Northern Alps.

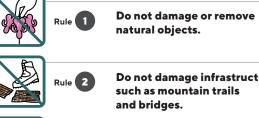


















Making the Most of Your Stay:

Tips for Lodging at Mountain Lodges

Unlike mountaineering national parks in Europe or North America, many of Japan's mountain lodges are located close to the highest peaks. Your cooperation is essential to operating these accommodations in such extreme locations, and it is important to follow the basic manners and rules. Review these tips before you go to ensure a smooth stay.



nals, birds, and insects. It sports a distinctive



lps. Their diet includes leaves, bamboo shoots ts, and nuts. Visitors from abroad are often sur ised to find monkeys, which are more commonly associated with tropical areas, in such a cold, harsh

Asian Black Bear(Ursus thibetanus)

te patch in the shape of a crescent moon on its st. Adults have an average weight of 135 kilos but can reach 200 kilograms. anese Macaque(Macaca fuscata) Japanese macague or "snow monkey" can be nd in many areas of the park, particularly in Kaochi and at other high altitudes in the Northern

gely herbivorous, though it will feed on small

gency could cause delays.

The Early Bird

Some hikers hit the trails while it is still dark, and almost every-

a minimum.

one leaves by 6:00 or 7:00 a.m. availability and quantity at the Since breakfasts need to be pre- lodges huts depend on their locapared and served, this means an tion, but all of them strive to coneven earlier start for the lodge's serve water. In some facilities, a staff. Evening meals are served charge will be required for filling early too, usually at around 5:00 your bottle.

Lights Out/Lights On

At mountain lodges, the lights all hikers to plan to arrive by usually turn off at 8:00 or 9:00 3:00 p.m. for their safety as an p.m. and come back on at around unexpected hazard or an emer- 5:00 a.m. Many hikers often go to bed even earlier than the lights Additionally, the weather can out time, so it's good to be careful change rapidly in the moun- about talking too loud or making tains. Arriving early helps to unnecessary noise. If you plan to avoid thunderstorms which leave very early, it's best to pack typically develop in the after- the night before to keep noise to

Water: The Source of Life

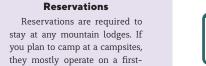
resource at high altitudes. The

A certain bedroom at a mountain lodge Toilet manner

Since mountain lodges are in quite remote areas, washrooms have composting toilets, which utilizes a biological process with bacteria, or vault toilets, come, first-served basis. If you which carry the human waste need to cancel your stay for any out by helicopters. The toilet reason, be sure to inform the systems don't need much water lodge. If someone fails to arrive to work, but toilet paper or any at the lodge and has given no kind of trash may prevent the notice, the proprietor may worry system from working properly, that you had an accident or emerso toilet paper will need to go gency.

campsites, the toilet fee is in- Because of unreliable internet connections, almost all mouncash for payment. You will also

to contribute \(\frac{1}{2}\) 100 per use of tain lodges do not accept credit cards, so please be sure to bring need small change to pay to use toilets. Additionally, there are NO ATMs in the national park.



they mostly operate on a first-

into a trashcan instead of the If you stay at the lodges or cluded. Other hikers are asked any toilet in this national park.

Camp only in designated areas. Do not leave garbage, food, Plan your hike carefully