

begin to make their appearance, presenting a colorful contrast with the remaining snowfields. For rainy-season hikes, however, it is best to choose routes where mountain huts are already open, because the weather is fickle and some trails may not yet be fully restored after winter damage.

The peak summer climbing season begins after the rainy season ends, usually in mid- to late July. All the huts are open, the summits are snow free, and most can be climbed without any special equipment. Naturally, this is a popular time for people to visit. The best plan is to hike earlier in the day, as afternoon squalls are a regular occurrence.

Autumn

The next high season runs from late September through mid-October, when the forests change from the lush green of summer to their autumn colors. The change begins at the higher altitudes and works its way down as the days get cooler. Some of the most famous areas, such as Karasawa, attract large numbers of hikers, 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. The contrasts are even more breathtaking after light snowfalls, which begin in October and become heavier and more frequent as autumn progresses. During this period, snow makes the trails slippery, leading to an increase in accidents. Temperatures can drop drastically, so be sure to carry warm hiking wear to prevent hypothermia. This is also when the mountain huts begin closing for winter.

Winter

Snowfall is heavy in the Northern Alps, and approaches should only be attempted by highly experienced hikers. All but very few of the huts are closed. However, visitors can enjoy other activities, such as skiing and snowshoe hiking, at lower altitudes.



Autumn:
Foliage in Karasawa

Winter: Hotaka Mountain Range
covered with deep snow

What to Bring: Hiking Equipment

1 Underwear, or base layer

Light synthetic fabric or wool that will dry quickly.

2 Middle layer

Quick-drying shirt (long-sleeved recommended).

3 Backpack

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

4 Hiking pants

Lightweight synthetic, unrestricting long pants (or shorts over tights).

5 Boots

High-cut hiking/trekking boots with good ankle support and traction, to be worn with heavy, warm socks.



A Tradition of Supporting Hikers

Japan's Mountain Huts



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 whom he expressed high praise in the book.

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 university alpine club was founded at Keio University in 1915. The sport quickly spread all over the country, 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 destinations for hikers.

The first Hotaka hut was build in 1925
(presently Hotakadake Sanso hut)

There are about 100 mountain huts in operation throughout Chubusangaku National Park, offering meals, accommodation, safety support, and information. Their origins may have been the small shelters built by loggers and hunters in the Edo period (1603–1867), but as mountaineering took off at the beginning of the twentieth century, huts began to focus on serving the needs of hikers. Some of the most famous have recently passed the 100-year mark: the Yarisawa Lodge opened in 1917, while Enzanso has been around since 1921. By the time the area was designated as a national park in 1934, most of today's huts were already in operation.

As the numbers of hikers increased, the huts grew

Mammals

The park is home to many creatures great and small, protected through conservation and awareness programs.



Japanese Least Weasel(*Mustela itatsi*)

Called *okojo* in Japanese, this is one of the smaller members of the genus *Mustela*. While it looks adorable when standing on its hind legs, this furry creature is carnivorous and hunts small mammals and birds, like the rock ptarmigan.



Japanese Serow(*Capricornis crispus*)

Though its Japanese name, *kamoshika*, includes *shika*, which means deer, the Japanese serow is an even-toed bovine, a kind of goat-antelope. While not in danger of extinction, it is considered a symbol of Nagano and Toyama prefectures, and is therefore a protected species.



Asian Black Bear(*Ursus thibetanus*)

The Asian black bear, or *kuma*, is medium-sized and largely herbivorous, though it will feed on small mammals, birds, and insects. It sports a distinctive white patch in the shape of a crescent moon on its chest. Adults have an average weight of 135 kilograms but can reach 200 kilograms.



Japanese Macaque(*Macaca fuscata*)

The Japanese macaque or "snow monkey" can be found in many areas of the park, particularly in Kamikochi and at other high altitudes in the Northern Alps. Their diet includes leaves, bamboo shoots, insects, and nuts. Visitors from abroad are often surprised to find monkeys, which are more commonly associated with tropical areas, in such a cold, harsh habitat.

Making the Most of Your Stay

Unlike most mountain lodges in Europe, many of Japan's mountain huts are located close to the highest peaks. Operating accommodations in such extreme locales requires a lot of hard work and the cooperation of guests. Most Japanese hikers are already aware of the basic customs and schedules of the lodges, and hikers from overseas can ensure a smooth stay by learning in advance how things are done.

The Early Bird

Some hikers hit the trails while it is still dark, and almost everyone leaves by 5:30 or 6:00 a.m. Since breakfasts need to be prepared and served, this means an even earlier start for the hut's staff. Evening meals are served early too, usually at around 5:00 p.m. In order to prepare the correct number of meals and make room assignments, most huts expect hikers to arrive by 3:00 p.m. Arriving late creates additional work and problems for the staff.

Observing the customary arrival time may seem unnecessary to hikers who are renting a tent space and making their own meals, but latecomers will very likely find most good tent spots already occupied. The weather often deteriorates later in the day, and thick clouds and sudden rainstorms occur frequently.

Please keep in mind that another crucial reason for early check-in is the importance of daylight for any rescue operations. Conditions such as altitude sickness and hypothermia require a quick response.



Warm clothing

A fleece, down, or synthetic jacket and warm hat and gloves are also recommended for the colder temperatures at higher altitudes.



Rainwear

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



Helmet

Helmets are highly recommended on some difficult routes. Ask at the mountain hut where you are staying. Some huts offer rentals.



Map and compass

Always carry a detailed map of your route, as well as a compass. While the trails are well marked, a map and compass are useful if you get disoriented.



Cash

The mountain huts do not accept credit cards, so be sure to bring cash for payment. You will also need small change to pay to use toilets.



Trekking poles

When used appropriately, these can be helpful, particularly for beginners, by distributing the impact on the legs and adding extra points of contact.

Hiking the Northern Alps is far more enjoyable when you have the right equipment. It is more comfortable, lowers risk, and allows you to adapt to changing weather conditions. For a summer hike, we suggest you wear or bring the following.



Emergency first aid kit



Headlamp



Emergency tent



Hiking Equipment List

Hiking shirt	○
Hiking pants	○
Socks	○
Gloves	○
Hat	○
Warm clothing	○
Hiking boots	○
Gaitors	△
Change of clothes	△
Rainwear	○
Backpack	○
Backpack cover	△
Headlamp	○
Spare batteries	△
Toiletries	△
Towel	○
Sunglasses	○
Sunblock	○
Map	○
Compass	△
Writing utensil (pen)	○
Emergency first aid kit	○
Toilet paper	○
Camping stove & fuel	△
Knife	△
Dishes & cutlery	△
Food/snacks	○
Emergency tent	△
Garbage bag	○
Trekking poles	△
Cash	○
Mobile phone	○

○ Mandatory △ Recommended

larger. Until the advent of helicopters, everything was carried up by hand, and anyone who has made the climb with a full backpack can well imagine how difficult this must have been. Now, thanks to helicopter deliveries and generators, guests can enjoy such offerings as draft beer, ice cream, and filling, hot meals.

The huts have deep connections with their alpine locations. The operators and their employees are living encyclopedias who share their knowledge about the natural environment, trails, weather conditions, and much more. Most huts have been in the same family for generations, the operators' ancestors having laid the trails that hikers still use. They take responsibility for maintenance, replacing washed-out bridges, restoring damaged paths, and

Hiking Tips

- When hikers going in opposite directions meet, those who are ascending have priority.
- Rocks on the trails are sometimes marked with a circle for the correct path or an X for a direction to avoid.
- When a dislodged rock can endanger people below, hikers call out "Rakul" an abbreviation of rakuseki ("falling rock"). Conveniently, raku is pronounced much like the word "rock."
- The mountain slopes can be very steep, and going off-trail may not only damage the environment but also place you in danger.
- Listen to advice from mountain-hut staff, who are knowledgeable about their surroundings.
- Helmets are recommended for some of the more difficult sections.
- The weather can change very quickly in alpine locations. Be prepared and check forecasts often.
- Headlamps can be lifesavers when hikers are caught by nightfall on the trail, or for road and mountain crossings.

cutting back foliage. They are often on the front lines when it comes to rescue operations, facilitating communications and, in some areas, supporting adjacent clinics that provide basic medical services.



Mountain clinic opens during summer season at Yarigatake Sanso Hut.

- A hiking registration form should be submitted at the trailhead or on the Internet. This is extremely important in case of emergencies.
- In the case of an accident, you may incur costs for searching and rescuing. It is advisable to take out mountaineering insurance or travel accident insurance that covers hiking (it is possible to apply for this at a vending machine in Kamikochi)
- A navigation app is effective to prevent losing your way (there is a free English version). It is best to install it on your smartphone in advance, and download map data of your destination.



At difficult passages, calling out to each other can help you pass in a safe place



Paint marks like this are used to mark trails.

Tips for Lodging at Mountain Huts

Lights Out/Lights On

Depending on the hut, the lights will be turned off at 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. and back on at 4:00 or 5:00 a.m. Many hikers are in bed even earlier than 8:00 p.m., so everyone tends to quieten down by then. It is also customary to pack early the night before so as not to wake others with noisy preparations.

Water: The Source of Life

Water is an extremely precious resource at high altitudes. The availability and quantity at the huts depend on how close they are to a water source, but all of them strive to conserve water. Some may even charge for its use, depending on the collection method.

Reservations

Where possible, reservations should be made in advance. Not all mountain huts accept reservations, however, so carefully researching your options in advance is a must. If you have a reservation but decide to cancel your stay due to bad weather or for any other reason, be sure to inform the hut. The nonarrival of guests with reservations raises concerns about possible accidents on the trail.

Waste Not

Everyone is asked to carry out any garbage they generate. Toilet rules vary from hut to hut. Some require used toilet paper to be placed in a waste basket next to the toilet. Toilet waste is either carried out of the park or broken down through a waste-treatment system, both of which require considerable effort. While guests staying at the huts and campsites can use the toilets free of charge, others are asked to contribute ¥100 per use.

Too Close for Comfort

The huts can get very crowded during peak season and on weekends. They never refuse anyone in need of shelter, so sharing a futon mattress is a possibility. If you fear becoming claustrophobic, avoid weekends and the peak seasons.

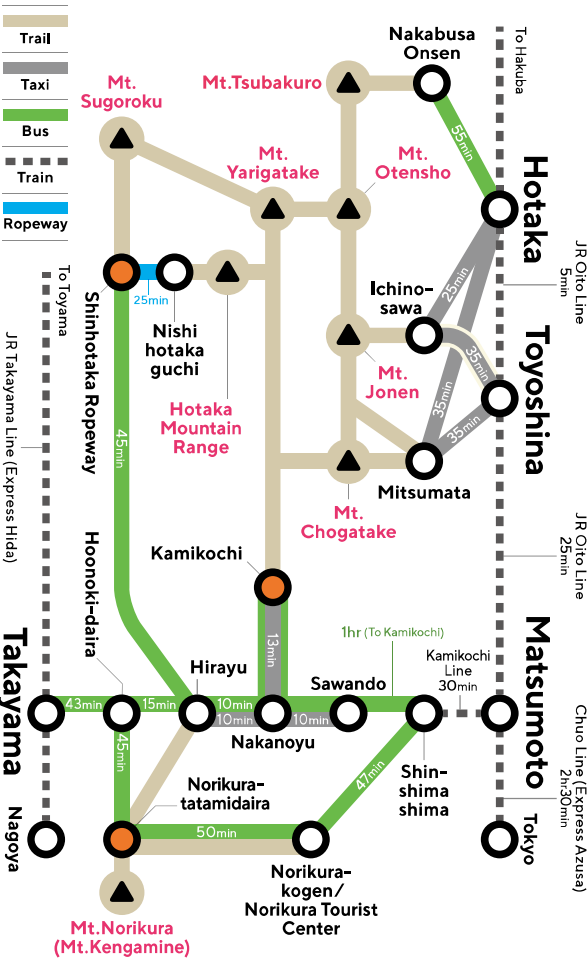
Cash

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A certain bedroom at a mountain hut

Getting There



Matsumoto City in Nagano Prefecture and Takayama City in Gifu Prefecture are starting points for accessing Chubusangaku National Park Southern Region. You can get to various trailheads using railroad, bus and taxi.