

Japanese Alps



Yari/Hotaka/Norikura
Mountain Range

Chubusangaku National Park

Hiking Guide& Map

Birthpols

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. Oku-Hotakadake, 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. Tsubakuro, 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 conditions.

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.

Geography and Geology

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 formed 50 to 130 million years ago, the age of this



Mt. Tsubakuro with its beautiful granite forms

Enjoying the Flora and Fauna

Hikers will come across all kinds of plant and animal life, some of which is indigenous to or found only in Japan.

Trees and Other Plants

The trees and other plant species that populate the forests of Chubusangaku National Park vary by area and altitude.



Veratrum

Veratrum, or *kobaikeiso*, is a toxic flowering plant recognizable by its straight stems with multiple white blossoms. It is found in areas of damp soil and blooms every few years in midsummer.



Japanese Rowan (*Sorbus commista*)

The Japanese rowan's name, *nanakamado*, is made of two words meaning "seven" and "oven," from the belief that it is such a slow-burning firewood it can be used in an oven seven times. Also known as mountain ash, it bears small white flowers in spring, followed by brilliant red berries and leaves in autumn.



Chinguruma (*Geum pentapetalum; avens*)

An alpine plant that frequently colonizes areas around snowy fields which symbolizes arrival of early summer. It blooms in one place after another as the snow melts and the ground is exposed, and since it blooms in short period of time, about 1 to 2 weeks, its flowering tells of the progress of snow melting. After the flowers stop blooming, the pale pink spikes fly away in the wind. The sight resembles children(chigo's windmills(kazaguruma), and so the name Chinguruma was given. The leaves also turn color vividly in the fall, so it can be enjoyed in 3 different forms. Although looking like a grass, it is actually a tree.

Information

Alpine Wonderland
(Chubusangaku National Park Southern Region)

<https://alpinewonderland.com/>

Kamikochi Visitor Center

TEL: 0263-95-2606

Kamikochi Information Center

TEL: 0263-95-2433

Norikura Visitor Center

TEL: 0263-93-2045

Sawando National Park Gate

TEL: 0263-93-3355

Shinhotaka Mountaineering Advice Center

TEL: 0578-89-3610

(JNTO) **National Parks of JAPAN**

<https://www.japan.travel/national-parks/parks/chubusangaku/>

Matsumoto City Alps Sangakukyo

<https://alps-sangakukyo.jp/> TEL: 0263-94-2221

Azumino Tourist Association

<https://www.azumino-e-tabi.net/en/> TEL: 0263-82-3133

Omachi City Tourism Association

<http://www.kanko-omachi.gr.jp/en/> TEL: 0261-22-0190

Okuhida Onseno Tourism Association

<https://www.okuhida.or.jp/en/> TEL: 0578-89-2614

Hida Norikura Tourism Association

<http://www.hidatorikura.jp/en.html> TEL: 0577-78-2345

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Ministry
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About Trails

The Northern Alps routes are divided into hiking routes suitable for hikers and climbing/scaling routes. The hiking routes marked on the map that are suitable for hikers in the snow-free season (roughly July through October) are laid as trails, with signposts in places such as junctions that indicate present location and destination. On climbing 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.



A well maintained hiking route

range's granite is under 5 million years.

The great, U-shaped valleys of these mountains, 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 seek

When to Hike

From November to June, the mountain peaks in Chubusangaku National Park are covered in snow—inaccessible to all but the most expert climbers. The peak hiking season runs from late July until mid-August, when temperatures range from 15°C to 25°C at lower altitudes and from 5°C to 15°C at higher altitudes. Earlier in spring and later in autumn, temperatures can be more than 20 degrees lower.

Spring

Spring in the mountains begins at the end of April, usually around the holiday period known as Golden Week. Huts throughout the park begin opening their doors around that time as popularity demands and the melting snows allow. The higher peaks, such as Mt. Yarigatake, Mt. Hotaka, and Mt. Jonendake, are all still completely snow-covered in spring, so crampons, ice axes, and experience are essential.

Summer

The rainy season usually starts in late June and lasts about a month. However, even during this period, there are days when the skies are clear, and some experts believe these are the best times for hiking. There are few people on the trails, and alpine flowers of all varieties



Spring : Snow remains through spring in the Northern Alps

Summer : Alpine foliage with Mt. Yarigatake in the distance.

A Historic View: Climbing in the Birthplace of the "Japanese Alps"

Modern alpinism in Japan began in the Chubusangaku National Park with the arrival of European mountaineers in the Meiji era (1868–1912). But as in other regions of Japan, climbing in these mountains has its roots in the country's indigenous religion, which deifies natural phenomena, including mountain peaks. Some areas had already become pilgrimage destinations or special sites where priests underwent strenuous ascetic training.

The first ascent of Mt. Yarigatake, the centerpiece of the Northern Alps, was made in 1828 by a Buddhist priest named Banryu. Besides ascetics

source of great pleasure for tired hikers who soak in the steaming mineral waters.



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

a Buddhist priest named Banryu. Besides ascetics, the mountains were also the domain of woodcutters and hunters, and one hunter named Kamijo Kamonji is now famed for guiding the first non-Japanese climber, William Gowland, to the peak of Mt. Yurigatake in 1877. Gowland was a British engineer and archaeologist, one of the many international experts invited to Japan to help with industrialization during the Meiji era. He was also an enthusiastic climber, and the first use of the term “the Japanese Alps” appears in his writings.



Portrait of Banryu, owned by Jo-on-ji Temple



Angelica pubescens

Called *shishiudo* in Japan, this is a native plant with delicate white blossoms resembling fireworks that emerge from its tall stems in July and August.



Japanese Beech(*Fagus crenata*)

The Japanese beech, or *buna*, is a deciduous tree native to Japan and can grow at altitudes of up to 1,400 meters. Its ability to absorb and store rainwater in its trunk and roots helps prevent erosion, and the evaporation of water through its leaves acts as a natural cooler and climate modifier. The tree's leaves turn yellow in autumn.



Japanese White Birch(*Betula platyphylla*)

The white birch, or *shirakaba*, is found throughout the mountains at altitudes of around 1,500 meters and can be recognized by its white, flaky bark and lime-green leaves that turn golden yellow in autumn.



Siberian Dwarf Pine (*Pinus pumila*)

Dense fields of Siberian dwarf pine (*haimatsu*) can be found at high altitudes near the tree line throughout the park, creating a safe haven for the Japanese rock ptarmigan.



Japanese Larch(*Larix kaempferi*)

The Japanese larch, or *karamatsu*, is the only deciduous coniferous tree native to Japan. It comes into leaf early in spring, and its needles turn bright yellow before being shed in autumn.



Komakusa (*Dicentra peregrina*)

Its pink flowers bloom in gravelly granite where other plants cannot live. The sight of its flowers nobly blooming in this harsh environment has earned its name of “Queen of the alpine flora.” The name Komakusa (horse plant) is derived from the resemblance to a face of a horse. Parsley-like thin leaves send water directly to its own roots by changing moisture in the air into water droplets.

Birds

Bird watchers will find the park a habitat for migratory and nonmigratory species, including:



Japanese Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*)

The Japanese rock ptarmigan (its Japanese name *raicho* means “thunder bird”) is a heavy-bodied ground feeder about the size of a small chicken that is found in alpine areas of dwarf Siberian pine. It is noted for its pure-white coloring during the winter. Its survival at high altitudes made it a symbol of the mountain 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 humans, hikers spot them quite frequently.



Alpine Accentor (*Prunella collaris*)

With its streaked brown back, gray head and reddish-brown spotted breast, the alpine accentor (*iwahibari* in Japanese) is found in mountain areas with little vegetation. It can be found at elevations of over 2,000 meters but usually winters at lower altitudes, and is known for its beautiful song, warbled while in flight.



Spotted Nutcracker (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*)

The spotted nutcracker, or *hoshi-garasu*, is a member of the crow family and feeds on insects, nuts, and pine cones. It is found in coniferous mountain forests and has an excellent memory, remembering hundreds of locations where it has buried food. Its distinct white-spotted pattern is elegant and eye-catching.



Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

A matured bird is blackish-brown all over with golden brown at the back of the head. The wingspan can reach up to an impressive 2m. They look majestic as they circle and fly on the rising airflow. Steep mountainous 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 nationally endangered wildlife species under threat of extinction, it will be precious experience if you spot it.