Japanese Alps Yari/Hotaka/Norikura Mountain Range

Chubusangaku National Park

National Parks of Japan

0

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

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

and forming this long series of mountains

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 moun-

tain 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 recogniz-

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.



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 soak in the steaming mineral waters.



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

When to Hike

tumn, 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.

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 in the Northern 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.

Yarigatake 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.

Enjoying the Flora and Fauna

bakuro with its beautiful granite forms

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.

/eratrum

(A)



apanese Rowan (Sorbus commista)





ngelica pubescens *shishiudo* in Japan, this is a native plant with cate white blossoms resembling fireworks that rge from its tall stems in July and August.



panese Beech(Fagus crenata) panese beech, or *buna*, is a deciduous tree nativ an and can grow at altitudes of up to 1,400 meter bility 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

panese White Birch(Betula platyphylla) ne white birch, or *shirakaba*, is found throughou mountains at altitudes of around 1.500 meter nd can be recognized by its white, flaky bark and e-green leaves that turn golden yellow in autumn

Siberian Dwarf Pine (Pinus pumila) ense fields of Siberian dwarf pine (haimatsu) can e found at high altitudes near the tree line throughit the park, creating a safe haven for the Japanes ck ptarmigan.

Japanese Larch(Larix kaempferi)

ne Japanese larch, or *karamatsu*, is the only de ious coniferous tree native to Japan. It come o leaf early in spring, and its needles turn bright w before being shed in autumn

omakusa (Dicentra peregrina) pink flowers bloom in gravely granite where other nts cannot live. The sight of its flowers nobly bloom g in this harsh environment has earned its name of en of the alpine flora." The name Komakusa (horse) is derived from the resemblance to a face of a rse. 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 parl a habitat for migratory and nonmigratory species, including



means "thunder bird") is a heavy-bodied ground eder about the size of a small chicken that is found n alpine areas of dwarf Siberian pine. It is noted for 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.



vn for its beautiful song, warbled while in flight.



Golden Eagle (Aquila chrysaetos) A matured bird is blackish-brown all over with goldn brown at the back of the head. The wingspan can ach up to an impressive 2m. They look majestics as circle and fly on the rising airflow. Steep mounous areas are its natural habitat, building nests n 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





you spot it.





-



















From November to June, the mountain peaks in Chubusangaku National Park are covered in snowinaccessible 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 au-

Summer

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

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



covered with deep snow

A Historic View:

Climbing in the Birthplace of the "Japanese Alps"

The first ascent of Mt. Yarigatake, the centerpiece of the Northern Alps, was made in 1828 by 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.



Portrait of Banryu owned by Jo-on-ji Temple

Japanese Rock Ptarmigan (Lagopus muta)

Alpine Accentor (Prunella collaris)

e Japanese rock ptarmigan (its Japanese name rai

7ith its streaked brown back, gray head and red-

n-brown spotted breast, the alpine accentor (iwahi

uri in Japanese) is found in mountain areas with little

tation. It can be found at elevations of over 2.000

eters but usually winters at lower altitudes, and is



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 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.

Mammals

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



led okojo in Japanese, this is one of the smallmbers of the genus Mustela. While it looks rable when standing on its hind legs, this furry ture is carnivorous and hunts small mammal birds, like the rock ptarmigan anese Serow(Capricornis crispus)

igh its Japanese name, kamoshika, includes tika, which means deer, the Japanese serow is an n-toed bovine, a kind of goat-antelope. While not langer of extinction, it is considered a symbol of ano and Toyama prefectures, and is therefore a

sian Black Bear(Ursus thibetanus) Asian black bear, or *kuma*, is medium-sized l largely herbivorous, though it will feed on small nals, birds, and insects. It sports a distinctive ite patch in the shape of a crescent moon on it st. Adults have an average weight of 135 kiloms but can reach 200 kilogram

nese Macaque(Macaca fuscata) Japanese macague or "snow monkey" can be nd in many areas of the park, particularly in Ka . Their diet includes leaves, bamboo shoots s, and nuts. Visitors from abroad are often sursed to find monkeys, which are more commonly

What to Bring: Hiking Equipment

2

-4

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, unconstricting 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



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

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.





appropriately, these Helmets are highly recomm can be helpful, on some difficult routes. Ask at particularly for the mountain hut where you are staying. Some huts offer rentals.



Windproof and waterproo

(breathable fabric

recommended).

Trekking poles

When used

beginners, by

jacket with a hood and pants

Always carry a detailed map of your route, as well as a compass. accept credit cards, so be sure to While the trails are well marked, bring cash for payment. You will a map and compass are useful if you get disoriented to use toilets

The mountain huts do not also need small change to pay

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 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

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 cance your stay due to bad weather of for any other reason, be sure to inform the hut. The nonarriv of guests with reser 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

osites 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 kends. 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.



A certain bedroon at a mountain hut











cochi and at other high altitudes in the Northern associated with tropical areas, in such a cold, harsl habitat.

It was another British climber, a missionary whom he expressed high praise in the book.

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.



	Hiking pants Socks	õ
	Gloves	
	Hat	
Y.	Warm clothing	
	Hiking boots	õ
	Gaitors	
	Change of clothes	Δ
	Rainwear ·····	0
	Backpack ······	0
	Backpack cover ·······	Δ
	Headlamp ·····	0
	Spare batteries	Δ
1	Toiletries	
	Towel	
	Sunglasses	
	Sunblock	
	Мар	0
•	Compass	
	Writing utensil(pen) ······	
	Emergency first aid kit ·····	0
	Toilet paper ·····	0
	Camping stove&fuel Knife	
	Dishes&cutlery	
	Food/snacks	Ŷ
	Emergency tent	
	Trekking poles	$\tilde{\mathbf{v}}$
	Cash	$\overline{\mathbf{a}}$
	Mobile phone ·····	
	Frome phone	0
	OMandatory ∆Recommend	led

Hiking Equipment List

Hiking shirt

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 "Raku!" 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 sec-• The weather can change very quickly in alpine locations. Be pre-
- pared and check forecasts ofter • Headlamps can be lifesavers when hikers are caught by nightfall
- on the trail, or for predawn departures • A hiking registration form should be submitted at the trailhead or on the Internet. This is extremely important in case of emer-
- 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



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



At difficult passages, calling Paint marks like this a used to mark trails.



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.