

Hokkaido's National Parks

Hokkaido is home to six national parks. Recognized as places of significant scenic beauty, they are managed by the national government.

Akan-Mashu National Park

Akan-Mashu National Park boasts a unique landscape of primeval forests, enormous lakes, and ancient volcanoes. It is centered around three caldera lakes: Lake Kussharo is one of the largest caldera lakes in Japan; Lake Mashu holds the world record for highest water transparency; and Lake Akan is the home of Marimo, also known as moss balls, a rare spherical alga designated as a Special Natural Monument of Japan. There are also numerous smaller lakes in the park, including Onneto, Penketo, and Panketo, all the result of prehistoric volcanic eruptions from Mt. Oakan and Mt. Meakan. Volcanic activity continues to this day in the form of steaming sulfur mounds at Mt. Io, as well as pools of boiling volcanic mud called *bokke* that are found along the shore of Lake Akan. Bihoro Pass, Sogakudai, and other observatories dotted around the park offer stunning panoramic views of this diverse, well-conserved landscape.

Kushiro Shitsugen National Park

Kushiro Shitsugen National Park includes the largest wetland in Japan and its surrounding hills. Despite the close proximity to an urban area, conservation efforts made by the local community have resulted in little human impact on the natural environment. The wetland has forests of alder trees, meandering rivers, and a low-lying marsh rich in reeds and sedges. The marsh provides a habitat for a variety of precious flora and fauna, including red-crowned cranes which are designated as a Special Natural Monument of Japan. Kushiro Shitsugen is registered as a Ramsar Site for the international importance of its wetlands. Within the national park, popular activities include canoeing on Lake Toro and Lake Takkobu, watching the sunset over Shirarutoro Lake, and the views of the expansive marshlands from Cape Miyajima, Cape Kirakotan, Mt. Iwabokki, and the Hosooka View Point.

The Ramsar Convention

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of important wetlands serving as waterfowl habitats, and for the protection of the animals and plants which inhabit them. The Convention was enacted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971, and there are now more than 2,300 Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) worldwide. Japan joined the convention in 1980 with Kushiro Marsh as its first designated site. To become a Ramsar Site, a region must meet strict criteria: it must be a site containing a representative and rare wetland; or a site of international importance for conserving biological diversity, including supporting endangered species or at least 20,000 waterbirds, while also providing a food source for fish, spawning grounds, and a juvenile fish habitat.

