

Experiencing Oku-Nikko

The stunning lakes, waterfalls, peaceful wetlands, and sulfurous hot springs of Oku-Nikko, were formed over millennia by volcanic activity and other natural forces. The region today offers visitors an opportunity to enjoy spectacular landscapes, to encounter wildlife, and to experience the dynamic, ever-changing rhythms of nature.

Oku-Nikko's Sacred Sites and Cosmopolitan Face

Towards the end of the Nara period (710–794), the mountains of Oku-Nikko were considered sacred, and generations of novice monks have visited Oku-Nikko for the purpose of religious training. Mt. Nantai has particular spiritual significance, and remains a symbol of Oku-Nikko today.

The shrines and temples of Nikko are designated World Heritage Sites. They are closely connected with the sacred nature of the landscape. Shodo (735–817), the great priest who founded the Futarasan Shrine and Rinnoji Temple at Nikko, is said to have discovered Lake Chuzenji, having spotted it from Mt. Nantai. These sites have been revered ever since, and special events held on the mountain and at the lake continue to this day.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, foreign residents and diplomats were attracted by the beauty and mild climate of Oku-Nikko and built villas, creating one of the first multicultural communities in Japan. The former British and Italian embassy villas on the shores of Lake Chuzenji are open to the public.

This combination of culture with nature is symbolic of the great respect in which the Japanese have held nature since ancient times.

Discover the Diverse Flora and Fauna

Spring through summer is a wonderful season in Nikko when the wildflowers are all in bloom. On walks in the wetlands, visitors are likely to see hare's-tail cottongrass and Hozaki shimotsuke (*Spiraea salicifolia*) in the Senjogahara Wetland, and Japanese thistle (*Cirsium japonicum*) in the Odashirogahara Wetland. Hungarian glider (*Neptis rivularis*) and silver-studded blue (*Plebejus argus*), which feed on the flowers of Hozaki shimotsuke (*Spiraea salicifolia*) as caterpillars, can also be observed. This is also the season to watch birds: common stonechats (*Saxicola torquatus*) are regular visitors to the wetlands, and black-faced buntings (*Emberiza spodocephala*) are frequently spotted on Japanese crabapple trees (*Malus sieboldii*).

Visitors can experience the cool waters of the Kegon no taki Falls and the Ryuzu no taki Falls, while enjoying the colorful azaleas that frame them. With the coming of summer, the lush greenery deepens in color, and the greens of the trees in full leaf are stunning.

When fall comes, Oku-Nikko is transformed. Brilliantly colored leaves carpet the woods, painting Oku-Nikko red and gold.

The region has a wide variety of trees, including maples. Plants in the wetlands, such as Hozaki shimotsuke (*Spiraea salicifolia*), also change color, creating beautiful tapestries of color.

Warmth in an Austere White Wonderland

A hush descends on Oku-Nikko as winter closes in. The mountains and grasslands are blanketed in powder snow, the lakes freeze over, and the air is crystal clear. The stillness presses on the senses. Winter activities, including snow shoe hiking and skiing, are highly recommended.

Soaking in the traditional onsen hot springs here is not to be missed during this chilly season. Onsen are popular in Japan, and Oku-Nikko Yumoto Onsen has a long history as a hot spring resort. The region offers many traditional Japanese ryokan inns. Oku-Nikko Yumoto Onsen is the ideal place to lodge as access from there to the Senjogahara Wetland and other areas in Nikko is easy.

Going with the Flow: Oku-Nikko's Trails

A good way to enjoy Oku-Nikko's lakes, rivers, and streams is on the paths around Lake Yunoko's shores.

Visitors can begin their journey from the warm waters of Lake Yunoko. Waters from here flow over the Yudaki Falls, and into the Yugawa River. Strolling along the Yugawa River, the gentle flow and clear waters of the river are quite mesmerizing. Following the stream, the path joins the Senjogahara's nature trail, passes the Ryuzu no taki Falls, until eventually reaching Lake Chuzenji. Rain water is filtered and purified through the forest soils, and feeds into the rivers, which in turn flow into Lake Chuzenji. The waters of the lake then cascade over the Kegon no taki Falls, and eventually flows to the towns and villages downstream.