

## Fuji Five Lakes

The name “Fuji Five Lakes” (*Fuji goko*) is relatively recent. Although the lakes around Mt. Fuji have been a popular attraction for centuries, the name was first coined in 1927 by entrepreneur and politician Ryohei Horiuchi for an entry in a newspaper contest to select the finest scenery in Japan. In a sense, the name marked the region’s arrival as a fully modern tourist destination.

The lakes themselves form an arc that sweeps around the northern side of the mountain. From west to east, they are Lake Motosuko, Lake Shojiko, Lake Saiko, Lake Kawaguchiko, and Lake Yamanakako—the last being larger than the others and closest to Mt. Fuji. But this geography is relatively recent, shaped by repeated volcanic activity.

The three westernmost lakes were once a single vast body of water known as the Old Senoumi. Motosuko was the first to be cut off from the rest of the original lake by lava flows 4,500 years ago. The *Nihon Sandai Jitsuroku*, an official history compiled in the year 901, relates how “earth and rock melted and flowed” into what remained of the Senoumi in the Jogan Eruption of 864. This not only created the ground surface beneath the Aokigahara Jukai Forest but also split the lake into today’s Shojiko and Saiko. Geologists believe that Motosuko, Shojiko, and Saiko are still connected underground, as all three have the exact same elevation. Repeated eruptions over the centuries also dammed and redirected rivers northeast of Fuji, giving Kawaguchiko and Yamanakako their present shape.

Each lake has its own character. Yamanakako is the largest and closest to Mt. Fuji, and is popular with fans of aquatic sports. Kawaguchiko is the lowest in elevation, and has the only island in the lake system, Unoshima. Saiko’s proximity to the northern mountain range offers excellent hiking opportunities. Shojiko, the smallest lake, was the first to have a Western-style hotel on its shores. And Motosuko is the deepest and most remote of the Five Lakes, making it popular with campers. Of course, each lake offers unique views of Mt. Fuji, making them popular with photographers.