

Thee Minami Alps

Welcome to the Minami Alps, the crown jewel of Minami Alps National Park, which covers parts of Yamanashi, Nagano, and Shizuoka prefectures. The mountains are easily accessible from Tokyo, and offer rugged peaks, seasonal alpine flowers and trees, and a wide range of wildlife in a relatively compact area.

Also known as the Southern Alps, this range has eleven mountains over 3,000 meters in height, most of which are counted among the 100 Famous Mountains of Japan. However, this range formed differently from the rest of Japan's "Alps." Despite being ringed by volcanic peaks (including Mt. Fuji), these mountains were shaped by the uplift of tectonic plates rather than by volcanic activity.

The most dramatic peak in the Minami Alps is Mt. Kitadake, which means "north mountain." At 3,193 meters, it is second in height only to 3,776-meter Mt. Fuji, Japan's highest peak. Kitadake is a popular trekking destination, as the slopes are covered with flowering alpine plants during the late spring and summer. Many of these plants are remnants from the last ice age, about 10,000 years ago, when glaciers extended across the Minami Alps.

This is a land of steep valleys, fast-running rivers, and unusually high tree lines. The high-altitude forests flourish thanks to the relatively low levels of snow accumulation; and forestry was an essential part of the local economy for people living in the foothills of the mountains.