

The Four Seasons of Hakone

Spring

Spring is, above all, the season of the *sakura* (cherry blossoms). Painting the landscape in shades of pink and white, these symbolic flowers can usually be admired throughout the area between late March and mid-April. After the cherry blossoms come azaleas, which bloom in red, pink, and violet. As the snow on Mt. Fuji begins to melt, the hills and valleys of Hakone turn to rich shades of fresh green.

Summer

The summer weather is often misty and cloudy, particularly during the rainy season that typically lasts from June to mid-July. The high humidity brings out insects such as the Miyama stag beetle, which can grow up to 7 centimeters long, and the chestnut tiger butterfly, named for the bold brown, black, and white patterns on its wings. Summer plants found particularly in the Fuji-Hakone region include the *sansho-bara* (*Rosa hirtula*) rose and the *Hakone kometsutsuji* (*Tsusiophyllum tanakae*) heath, distinguished by its bell-shaped white flowers.

Autumn

The mild temperatures and frequent clear days of autumn make this season ideal for sightseeing. The fields of *susuki* grass in Sengokuhara turn silvery by mid-autumn, which is also when the seasonal foliage begins to color the mountainsides in shades of red and yellow.

Winter

A mountainous region at a high average elevation, Hakone often gets snow in winter. But Lake Ashi never freezes over, providing a sanctuary for aquatic birds including ducks and widgeons. Other often-seen winged winter visitors include the Eurasian bullfinch and the long-tailed rosefinch.