

Mt. Yarigatake

Mt. Yarigatake, with its spear-shaped peak, stands out in the Hotaka mountain range within Chubusangaku National Park. At 3,180 meters high, the mountain is the fifth highest in Japan. Another name for Mt. Yarigatake is “Japan’s Matterhorn,” due to its resemblance to the famous mountain that straddles the Swiss-Italian Alps.

The priest Banryu (1786–1840) was the first person recorded as having successfully climbed Yarigatake, in 1828. Banryu saw the mountain as a representation of the Buddhist Pure Land in this world. Stories say he spent over a month in a small cave near the summit chanting a Buddhist mantra. The first person from outside Japan to reach the summit was British mining engineer William Gowland (1842–1922), in 1878. It was he who coined the term “Japanese Alps.” Over the next half century, recreational mountain climbing developed rapidly in Japan, and “Yari,” as the mountain is affectionately known, is visited by many mountaineers each year. A number of trails of varying difficulty lead up to the peak. The most popular route is the approach from Kamikochi highland valley, which combines excellent mountain views with a relatively light climb.

Alpine flowers bloom along the mountain ridgelines in summer, and the endangered *raicho* (rock ptarmigan), which nests at high altitudes, may be spotted on the upper slopes. The area draws hikers and photographers seeking views from the summit, particularly on clear days.

Lodges are scattered throughout the mountains of Chubusangaku National Park, making it possible for climbers to scale Mt. Yarigatake and adjoining peaks over multiple days. The lodges on Yarigatake, many family-run, are clustered near the peak, and offer hot meals and accommodation to climbers who book in advance. Local residents help maintain the trails by cutting back foliage and replacing washed-out bridges. Dedicated efforts are made to preserve the natural beauty of the mountains, and the lodges have strict rules about trash disposal and water usage.