

## **Chubusangaku National Park**

### Southern Region

Chubusangaku National Park is nestled among the famous Northern Japanese Alps, and the 174,323-hectare park is filled with soaring peaks, clear mountain lakes and rivers, sweeping green valleys, and secluded hot-spring villages. This region became the center of European-style alpinism in Japan after British missionary Walter Weston (1860–1940) climbed Mt. Kasagatake in 1894. Japanese climbers have since combined traditional religious practices from Shugendo mountain asceticism, such as martial arts and mediating under waterfalls, with recreational mountaineering, and this pastime endures across the nation. As such, Chubusangaku National Park has become a mecca for mountain climbers and hikers.

Trails once used by mountain ascetics, who worshipped the mountains as deities, still wind through the park. Today, these same paths are used by hikers and campers taking in the seemingly endless mountain views. The park has plentiful flora and fauna, such as yellow and green alpine butterflies, rock ptarmigans, and *komakusa* (*Dicentra peregrina*), a plant with pink and white heart-shaped flowers. The deep forests and grass-covered plains were once used by woodcutters and miners, but are now protected areas that support numerous plants and animals of special interest. Much of the park was created by volcanic activity and shifts along fault lines. These also led to the creation of the hot-spring villages that are scattered throughout the mountains. The therapeutic baths there remain much as they were centuries ago.

Chubusangaku National Park offers a natural environment with opportunities for everything from hiking and camping in the summer to skiing and snowshoeing in the winter.

### Car Restrictions

Private vehicles are banned from certain sections of the park, and should be parked at one of the designated lots. The journey around the park can be completed by bus or taxi. Chubusangaku is the first national park in Japan to implement this measure, which is designed to protect the natural environment and reduce congestion on the narrow mountain roads.

