

Mountain Day—a new holiday for Japan

In summertime many Japanese enjoying hiking particularly in the mountains, although there are keen hikers who enjoy setting off up a mountain track at any time of year. This summer Japan will observe a new public holiday —11 August will now be known as Yama no Hi or Mountain Day. The public holiday will be a chance for people to celebrate mountains and all they have to offer. Certainly Japan has no shortage of mountains. Three quarters of the country is considered mountainous and there are tall and imposing mountain ranges that have long influenced the lives of Japanese people.

Japan's best known mountain is of course Mount Fuji, a dormant volcano which towers over the surrounding landscape at a lofty 3,776 metres. Since 2013 it has been a UNESCO designated World Heritage Site, not for its undeniable natural beauty but for its cultural significance.

Mt Fuji was inscribed on the World Heritage List as a cultural site and is described by UNESCO as a "sacred place and source of inspiration." In Japan, mountains were long thought to be the home of gods (*kami*) and ancestral spirits. Climbing mountains and walking pilgrimage routes paths such as the Kumano-kodo Pilgrimage Routes became part of religious practice.

If you travel around Japan you will find local versions of Mount Fuji, mountains that have nicknames comparing them to the original. Many Australian skiers would recognise Ezo-Fuji, the name given to Mt Yotei in Niseko, Hokkaido (Ezo is the old name for Hokkaido).

Mount Fuji might attract much of the attention, but there are beautiful and magnificent mountains throughout the country. Surely one of the most impressive mountain areas must be the ranges in the Chubu region (central Honshu). This area is known as 'the rooftop of Japan' and

there are many mountains which are taller than 3,000 metres, dwarfing Australia's highest peak (2,228m). This is also where you will find Mount Tate (Tateyama) and Mount Haku (Hakusan), which together with Mount Fuji are generally considered Japan's three holy mountains.



From this point on the Kumano-kodo pilgrimage route, Japan appears to be a sea of mountains. The mystical nature attributed to mountains is easy to appreciate in the evening light.

Apart from being a hiker's delight, all those mountains in a country with significant snow and rainfall result in many fast flowing rivers which spill out into the sea soon after leaving the mountain valleys and basins. The Kurobe River is noted for its steep fall—from its source more than 2,900 metres high up in the Japan Alps, the river reaches the Sea of Japan after travelling only 83km.

With such beautiful mountains and valleys, it is somewhat surprising that it took so long for a Mountain Day holiday to be proclaimed. After all, Japan has had Marine Day (Umi no Hi) in July since the 1940s. In fact, several prefectures had established their own Mountain Days, but with the new national public holiday on 11 August, summertime will now give everyone a chance to think about both the sea and the mountains which are so important to life in Japan.

Mountain Day will be Japan's sixteenth public holiday. This leaves only the month of June without one. While Japan has more public holidays than Australia, there is still a cultural reticence among many Japanese workers to take their annual leave entitlements.

Hello from the Editor

I would love to hear from you and what you think about our newsletter.

You are welcome to email me at cginfo@sy.mofa.go.jp, subject 'To the Editor', with any feedback or ideas, or to share your experiences of Japan.

Another way to get in touch is by doing a very short online questionnaire at www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/english/jrsurvey.html.

I hope to hear from you!
Jennifer Schroeder

EDITOR'S PIC.
*Mountains everywhere
Kanazawa-bound on the Hokuriku shinkansen*

