

Nikko

Tochigi Prefecture · Japan

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Nikko lies in the mountains of Tochigi Prefecture, about 140 km north of Tokyo. It is famous for the Tokugawa shrines and temples, which form a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The shrines stand among old cedar forest, and the lake and waterfalls of Oku-Nikko lie higher up the road.

The city is very large and stretches from the shrines to hot-spring resorts and mountain lakes. It suits travelers who want Japanese history and nature in one trip. Most people visit for a day from Tokyo, but a night or two lets you see the shrines and the mountains without rushing.

When to visit

Autumn is the most popular season. Leaves change first around Yumoto Onsen in early October, peak around Lake Chūzenji in mid to late October, and reach the town in the first half of November. October weekends bring heavy bus delays, so go on a weekday. Summer is warmer and rainy in town but cooler in the mountains. Winter is cold with snow, and some mountain trails close.

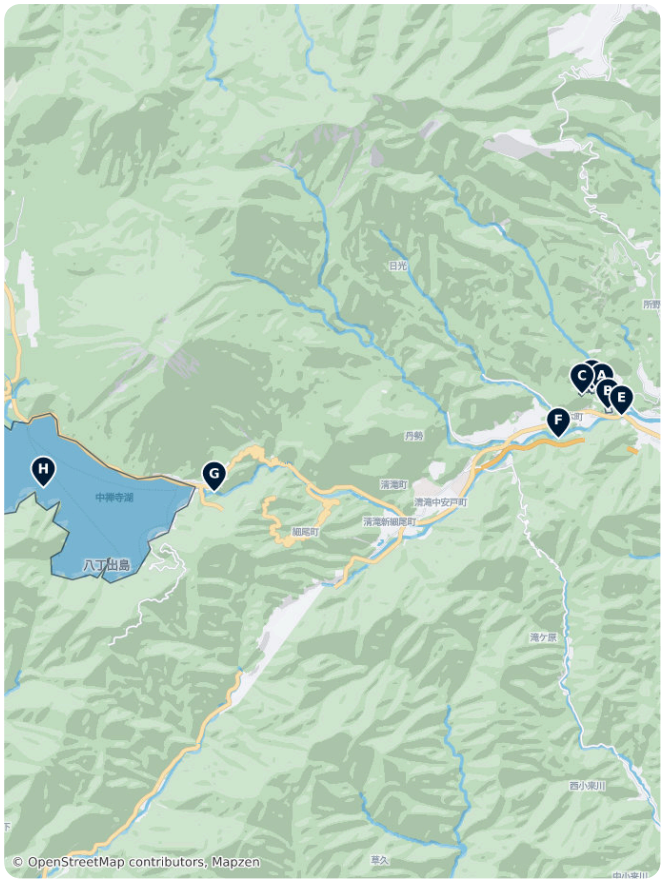
Oku-Nikko is much higher than the town. Lake Chūzenji is at 1,269 m, so it is colder than the climate figures below, which describe the town.

The biggest event is the Spring Festival at Tōshō-gū on 17 and 18 May. Mounted archery takes place on 17 May. On 18 May, about 1,000 people in samurai dress walk in a grand procession.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for sightseeing	0° / 4° Feels like -6°	-6° / -10°	19 rainy days · Dry air
February	Poor Poor for sightseeing	1° / 7° Feels like -5°	-6° / -11°	15 rainy days · Dry air
March	Poor Poor for sightseeing	6° / 15° Feels like 1°	-3° / -8°	15 rainy days · Dry air
April	Fair Fair for hiking	13° / 21° Feels like 10°	3° / -3°	13 rainy days · Dry air
May	Good Good for sightseeing	19° / 25°	8° / 2°	13 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
June	Good Good for sightseeing	23° / 27°	14° / 9°	16 rainy days · Calm winds
July	Fair Fair for sightseeing	27° / 31°	18° / 14°	21 rainy days · Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
August	Fair Fair for sightseeing	28° / 31°	19° / 15°	20 rainy days · Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
September	Good Good for sightseeing	24° / 29°	15° / 9°	18 rainy days · Humid air · Calm winds
October	Good Good for hiking	17° / 23°	9° / 3°	15 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
November	Fair Fair for hiking	11° / 17° Feels like 7°	3° / -2°	16 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
December	Poor Poor for sightseeing	4° / 10° Feels like -1°	-2° / -7°	20 rainy days · Dry air

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights



- A Tōshō-gū shrine is the shrine of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who founded the shogunate that ruled Japan until 1868. It was completed in 1617 and is known for rich carving, including the Three Monkeys and the Sleeping Cat. It is open from 9:00 to 17:00, or until 16:00 from November to March. Entry is ¥1,600, tickets at the counter are cash only, and the last entry is 30 minutes before closing.
- B Rinnō Temple Complex is the large Buddhist temple next to the shrines. It was founded in 766 and is one of the three parts of the World Heritage Site.
- C Taiyū-in is the mausoleum of Tokugawa Iemitsu, the grandson of Ieyasu. It lies within the Rinnō-ji grounds and dates from the 1650s.
- D Futarasan Shrine is the third part of the World Heritage Site and has 23 listed structures. It is a Shinto shrine, unlike the Buddhist temple next to it.
- E Shinkyo Bridge is a wooden arched bridge that belongs to Futarasan Shrine. It dates from 1904.
- F Kanmangafuchi Abyss is a gorge formed by lava from an eruption of Mount Nantai. A path runs past a long row of stone Jizō statues, some wearing red caps and bibs.
- G Kegon Falls falls almost 100 m. The upper platform is free, and a ¥600 elevator takes you to a lower viewing deck. It is a short walk from the Chūzenji Onsen bus terminal.
- H Lake Chūzenji sits at 1,269 m. Foreign embassies once built summer villas here, and two of them, the Italian and British villas, are open to visitors from spring to autumn.

Nikko – Plan Your Trip

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What to experience

- Take the sightseeing boat on Lake Chūzenji. It runs hourly from mid-April to November, and the full loop takes one hour (¥1,850).
- Hike the Senjōgahara marsh trail between Yumoto Onsen and Ryūzu Falls.
- Ride the bus up the Irohazaka road in autumn. It has 48 turns and climbs more than 400 m to the lake. Colors are best from mid-October to early November.
- Take the Akechidaira ropeway to a viewpoint of Kegon Falls.
- Soak in a hot spring at Yumoto Onsen after a hike. It is at the end of the main bus line.

Day trips

Most visitors arrive from Tokyo. These two stops fit the trip in or out of Nikko.

- Utsunomiya, the prefectural capital, is about 45 minutes from Nikko on the JR Nikko Line. It is a good place to change trains to the Shinkansen.
- Kinugawa Onsen is a hot-spring resort on the Tobu Kinugawa Line, reached by changing trains at Shimo-Imaichi. Edo Wonderland Nikko Edomura is a historical theme park, and Tobu World Square shows 1:25 scale models of famous buildings. Both suit families.

Where to explore

The mountain lake in Oku-Nikko has its own page:

- Lake Chūzenji is the lake, the waterfalls, and the hot springs nearby.

Getting there

- **By air**: Nikko has no airport. Fly to Tokyo (Narita or Haneda), then take a train. Tokyo is about 140 km away.
- **By Tobu train**: Limited express trains run from Asakusa in Tokyo to Tōbu-Nikkō in about 2 hours. Expect to pay roughly ¥2,850 to ¥3,540 with the supplement. Some trains change at Shimo-Imaichi. Slower express trains cost about ¥1,400. Tobu Railway Nikko information
- **By JR train**: One or two direct limited express trains a day run from Shinjuku in about 2 hours, with reserved seats only (about ¥4,140). Otherwise, take the Shinkansen to Utsunomiya and change to the JR Nikko Line. This takes about 100 minutes and costs about ¥5,500. JR East
- **Stations**: JR Nikko and Tōbu-Nikkō stations are close to each other. Both are a 30 to 40 minute walk from the main shrines, and buses run often.
- **Passes**: Tobu sells Nikko passes for foreign visitors. They cover a round trip from Asakusa and local buses, but not the limited express supplement. Check which area you need before you buy.

Nikko Official Guide

Getting around

- **Tobu buses**: These are the main way to get around. A bus from the stations to the shrine area takes about 10 minutes and costs ¥350. The World Heritage loop bus runs every 10 to 20 minutes. Suica and PASMO cards work on Tobu buses in the Nikko area.
- **To Oku-Nikko**: Buses to Chūzenji Onsen take about 50 minutes (¥1,250). Buses to Yumoto Onsen take more than an hour. A 2-day bus pass is sold at Tōbu-Nikkō Station for Chūzenji (¥2,300) or Yumoto (¥3,500).
- On foot: The shrines and temples are close together and easy to walk. The walk from the stations takes 30 to 40 minutes.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

Moderate

The shrine and temple area is compact and walkable, but Oku-Nikko and the other sights are far apart and need a bus.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Low

Hills and long distances make cycling a poor choice for most visitors.

Driving

- **Left side**: Japan drives on the left.
- **Licence**: Japan accepts only an International Driving Permit under the 1949 Geneva Convention, carried with your home licence. A 1968 Vienna Convention permit is not valid. Licences from Switzerland, Germany, France, Belgium, Monaco and Taiwan need an official Japanese translation from JAF instead.
- Is a car worth it? Not for the shrines. Buses cover the town and Oku-Nikko well. A car helps only for places away from the bus lines.
- Leaf season causes traffic jams on Irohazaka, so the bus is often no slower.

Food & drink

Nikko is known for yuba, the skin that forms on boiled soy milk. Temple monks ate a vegetarian diet, and yuba became a local staple. You will find it in soba bowls, in kaiseki meals at ryokan, and as snacks from street stalls. Soba noodles are the other local favorite.

Local sake comes from breweries in Imaichi. Shaved ice is a popular sweet.

What to eat & drink

DINNER

Sushi · 寿司 (Sushi)
Vinegared rice paired with raw fish, seafood, or vegetables; ranges from casual conveyor-belt shops to high-end counters.

Ramen · ラーメン (Ramen)
Wheat noodles in a meat or fish-based broth, with countless regional styles.

Tempura · 天ぷら (Tempura)
Lightly battered, deep-fried seafood and vegetables.

Okonomiyaki · お好み焼き (Okonomiyaki)
A savory grilled pancake with cabbage and a choice of fillings, popular in Osaka and Hiroshima.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Onigiri · おにぎり (Onigiri)
Rice balls wrapped in seaweed, often with a savory filling; an everyday convenience-store staple.

Yakitori · 焼き鳥 (Yakitori)
Grilled skewers of chicken, popular at izakaya alongside beer or sake.

DRINKS

Green Tea · 緑茶 (Ryokucha)
The everyday non-alcoholic drink, served hot or cold.

Sake · 日本酒 (Nihonshu)
Rice wine served warm or chilled, a traditional accompaniment to a meal.

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Safety & health

Nikko is very safe for tourists. Petty crime is rare.

- **Monkeys**: Wild monkeys live around the town. Do not feed them, and keep food out of sight.
- **Cold**: The mountains are much colder than the town, so bring warm layers for Oku-Nikko, even in autumn.
- Crowds: October weekends are very busy. Buses can be late, so allow extra time.

History

The priest *Shōdō Shōnin* founded Rinnō-ji in 766 and Chūzen-ji in 784, and a village grew around the temples. The place became famous in the 17th century, when the Tokugawa shoguns built their shrines here.

Tōshō-gū was completed in 1617. Ieyasu's grandson *Iemitsu* rebuilt it, and the main buildings date from 1636. The ornate Yōmeimon gate shows the style of that time. Iemitsu's own mausoleum was built in the 1650s.

In 1999, UNESCO listed the shrines and temples. The site has 103 buildings in three parts: Tōshō-gū, Futarasan Shrine, and Rinnō-ji. In 2006, Nikko merged with nearby towns, including Ashio. Ashio was a copper-mining town, and you can still visit Ashio Copper Mine.

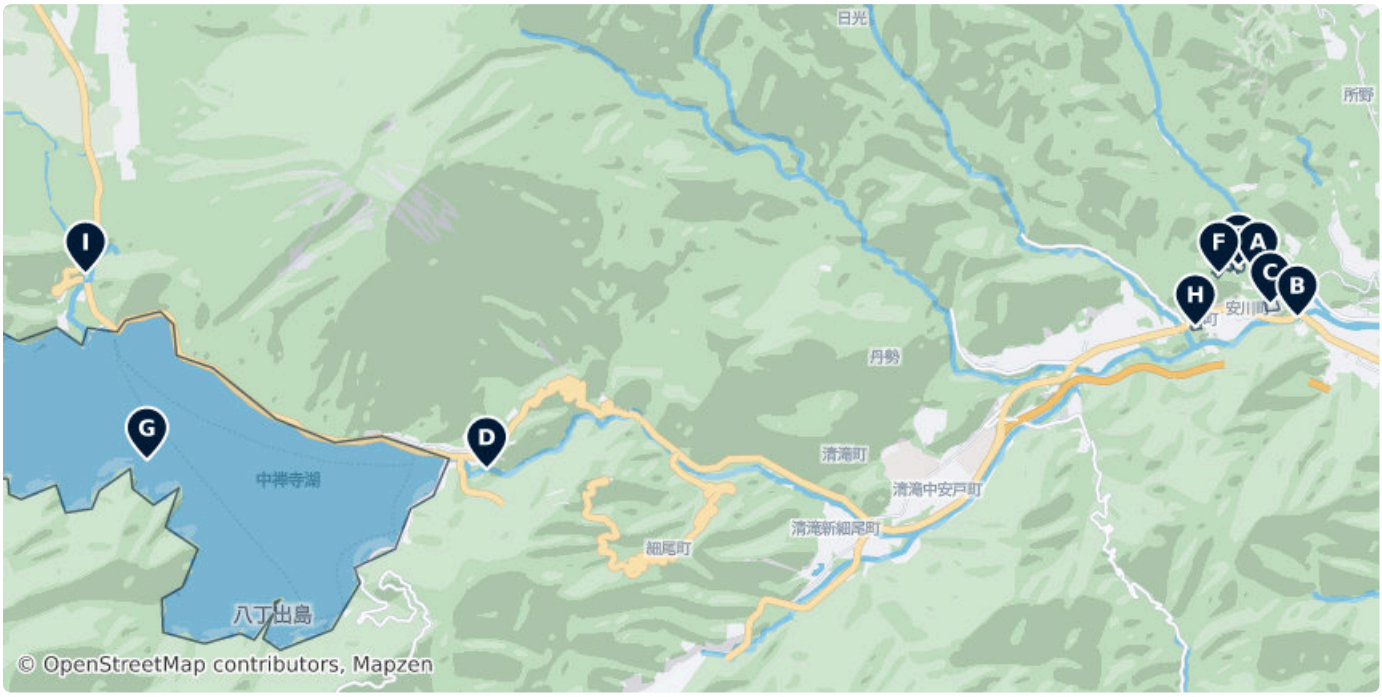
Country facts

Here are the essentials for traveling in Japan:

CURRENCY	ELECTRICITY	LANGUAGES	TAP WATER
JPY ¥	 Type A / Type B 100 V	Japanese	**Safe to drink**

Nikko's Sacred Treasures and Natural Wonders

Nikko features a concentration of UNESCO World Heritage sites and natural landmarks within the Nikko National Park. This selection highlights the opulent Tōshō-gū shrine, the final resting place of Tokugawa Ieyasu, and the Taiyuin mausoleum. Major religious sites like Rinnō-ji Temple and Futarasan-jinja are complemented by the iconic Shinkyo Bridge. The region's volcanic geography is represented by the 97-meter Kegon Falls, Lake Chūzenji at the foot of Mount Nantai, and the expansive wooden architecture of the Tamozawa Imperial Villa.





Ⓐ Tōshō-gū shrine

Nikkō Tōshō-gū is a Tōshō-gū Shinto shrine located in Nikkō, Tochigi Prefecture, Japan.

321-1431 日光市 (36.75774, 139.59909)

Mo–Su

Open 24/7

toshogu.jp, +81 288-54-0560



Ⓑ Shinkyo Bridge

One of the most beautiful bridges in the entire country, this bridge is part of the Nikko sanctuary complex, to which it leads.

2307 Sannai, Nikko, Tochigi-ken, 321-1431, Japan (36.75332, 139.60404)

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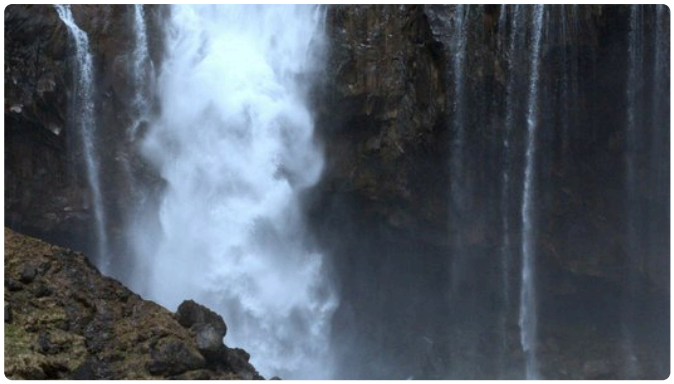
C Rinnō-ji Temple Complex

Rinnō-ji is a Tendai Buddhist temple in the city of Nikkō, Tochigi Prefecture, Japan.

Nikko, Japan (36.75465, 139.60063)

Apr-Oct Mo–Su	08:00–17:00
Nov-Mar Mo–Su	08:00–16:00

rinnoji.or.jp



D Kegon Falls

Kegon Falls is located at Lake Chūzenji in Nikkō National Park near the city of Nikkō, Tochigi Prefecture, Japan.

2479–2 Chugushi, Nikko, Tochigi-ken, 321-1661, Japan (36.73801, 139.50197)

+1 55–0030



E Futarasan-jinja shrine

Futarasan jinja is a Shinto shrine in the city of Nikkō, Tochigi Prefecture, Japan.

日光市山内２３０７ (36.75850, 139.59662)

Apr 01-Oct 31 Mo–Su	08:00–17:00
Nov 01-Mar 31 Mo–Su	08:00–16:00

futarasan.jp, +81 288-54-0535



F Taiyuinbyo Iemitsu Taiyuin Temple

The mausoleum of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, this UNESCO-listed complex features intricate black and gold carvings. While intentionally less opulent than Tōshō-gū, it showcases masterfully preserved Edo-period architecture across its gates and prayer halls.

Japan (36.75771, 139.59415)

Mo–Su	08:00–17:00

rinnoji.or.jp/temple/taiyuuin/



G Lake Chuzenji

Lake Chūzenji, also called Sea of Happiness, is a scenic lake in Nikkō National Park in the city of Nikkō, Tochigi Prefecture, Japan.

Japan (36.73895, 139.45918)



H Tamozawa Imperial Villa

This impressive villa is one of the largest wooden buildings in the country. Formerly an imperial palace, it now functions as a museum.

(Unnamed Road), Nikko, Japan (36.75239, 139.59120)

Mo–Su 09:00–17:00

park-tochigi.com/tamozawa/, +81 28-8536-767



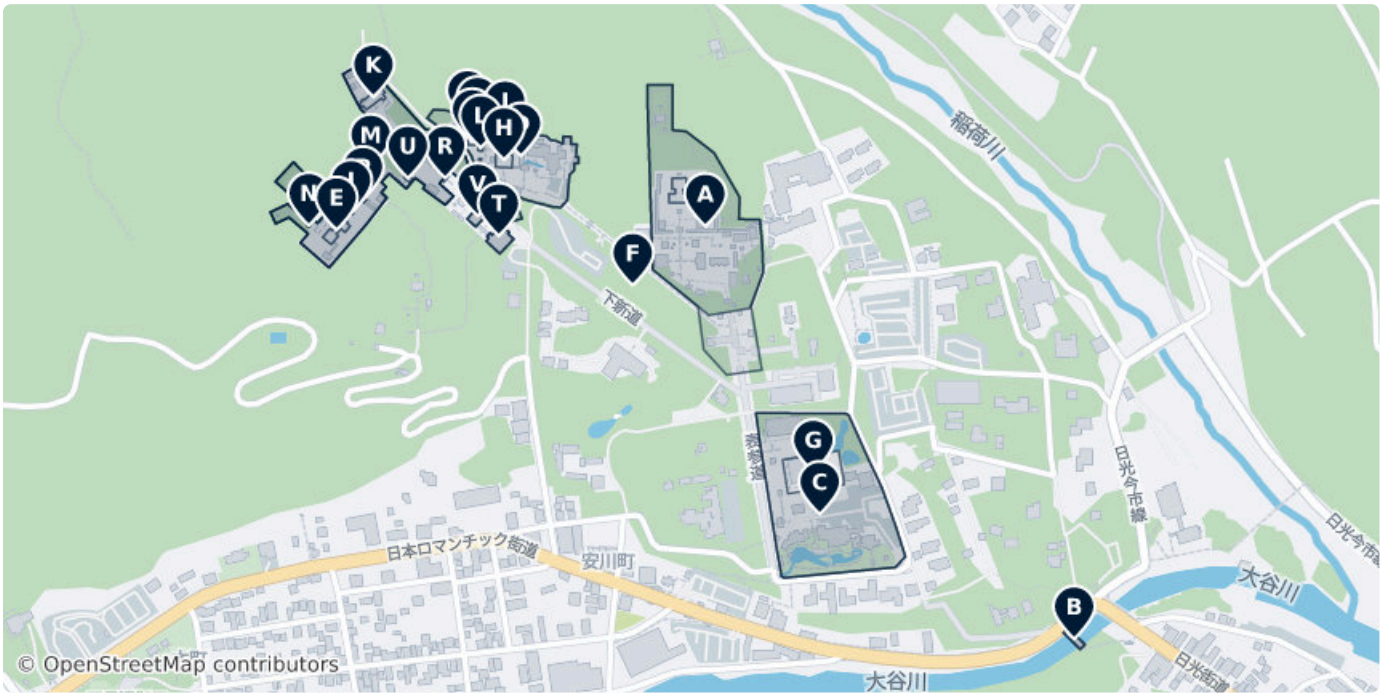
I Ryuzu Falls

Ryūzu Falls is a waterfall located upstream from the Yugawa River which makes its way into Lake Yunoko and Lake Chūzenji.

Nikko, Tochigi-ken, Japan (36.75770, 139.45145)

Nikko's UNESCO Heritage Sites

The Shrines and Temples of Nikko comprise 103 buildings across three main complexes: the Tōshō-gū Shinto shrine, the Futarasan-jinja Shinto shrine, and the Rinnō-ji Buddhist temple. Dating primarily from the 17th century, these structures represent the pinnacle of Edo-period architecture and artistic decoration. The site serves as the final resting place of Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu and illustrates the historical fusion of Shinto and Buddhist traditions within a sacred forest landscape of ancient cedar trees.





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Nikko, Japan (36.75465, 139.60063)

Apr-Oct Mo–Su	08:00–17:00
Nov-Mar Mo–Su	08:00–16:00

rinnoji.or.jp



D Futarasan-jinja shrine

Futarasan jinja is a Shinto shrine in the city of Nikkō, Tochigi Prefecture, Japan.

日光市山内２３０７ (36.75850, 139.59662)

Apr 01-Oct 31 Mo–Su	08:00–17:00
Nov 01-Mar 31 Mo–Su	08:00–16:00

futarasan.jp, +81 288-54-0535



E Taiyuinbyo Iemitsu Taiyuin Temple

Part of the Rinno-ji complex, this temple serves as the outer structure of the mausoleum for the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu.

Japan (36.75771, 139.59415)

Mo–Su	08:00–17:00

rinnoji.or.jp/temple/taiyuuin/



F Shrines and Temples of Nikkō

The UNESCO World Heritage Site Shrines and Temples of Nikkō encompasses 103 buildings or structures and the natural setting around them.

上新道, 安川町, Nikkō, 321-1401, Japan (36.75711, 139.59812)

G Sambutsudo (Hall of Three Buddhas)

The main hall of Rinno-ji Temple, housing three large, gold-leaf wooden statues representing the manifestations of Nikko's mountain deities: Amida, Senju-Kannon, and Bato-Kannon.

Nikko, Japan (36.75510, 139.60054)

Mo–Su Open 24/7

H Futarasan Haiden

The primary hall of worship at Futarasan Shrine, where traditional Shinto ceremonies and prayers are conducted.

Japan (36.75846, 139.59640)

Mo–Su Open 24/7

0288-54-0535

I Shōmen Karamon Gate

A Chinese-style gate located within the Taiyuin complex, featuring intricate carvings and traditional white and gold accents.

(36.75789, 139.59435)

J Futarasan Honden

The main sanctuary of Futarasan Shrine, dedicated to the three deities of Mount Nantai, Mount Nyoho, and Mount Taro.

Japan (36.75874, 139.59641)

K Bettōsho Ryūkō-in

A historical administrative residence and sub-temple within the sacred Nikko precinct.

(36.75913, 139.59465)

L Shin-yosha shrine

A dedicated building at Futarasan Shrine used for the storage and maintenance of sacred portable shrines known as mikoshi.

Japan (36.75859, 139.59608)

M Taiyū-in Mausoleum

The mausoleum of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu. The complex is noted for its black and gold lacquerwork and its architectural blend of Shinto and Buddhist elements.

Japan (36.75838, 139.59461)

Mo–Su Open 24/7

rinnoji.or.jp/temple/taiyuuin/

N Sayū Sodebe Gate

Also known as the Koka-mon, this Ming-dynasty style gate marks the entrance to the innermost sanctum of Shogun Iemitsu's tomb.

(36.75775, 139.59378)

O Mitomo Shrine

A small auxiliary shrine located within the Futarasan grounds, traditionally visited to pray for wisdom and academic success.

Japan (36.75878, 139.59604)

P Yashamon Gate

Known as the Gate of the Night Yakshas, this structure is decorated with colorful peony carvings and houses four guardian statues.

(36.75803, 139.59450)

Q 二荒霊泉

A sacred spring at Futarasan Shrine. The water is believed to benefit eyesight and is frequently used by local sake brewers.

(36.75886, 139.59591)

R Niōmon Gate

The grand entrance to the Taiyuin mausoleum, guarded by two large Nio statues representing the beginning and end of all things.

(36.75826, 139.59561)

S Daikoku-den shrine

A shrine building dedicated to Daikokuten, the deity of wealth and good fortune, located within the Futarasan complex.

Japan (36.75865, 139.59597)

T Jogyodo Hall

A Buddhist hall at Rinno-ji used for circumambulatory meditation, dedicated to the Amida Buddha.

Japan (36.75764, 139.59633)

U Nitemmon Gate

The second gate of the Taiyuin complex, housing statues of Komokuten and Jikokuten, two of the Four Heavenly Kings.

(36.75826, 139.59511)

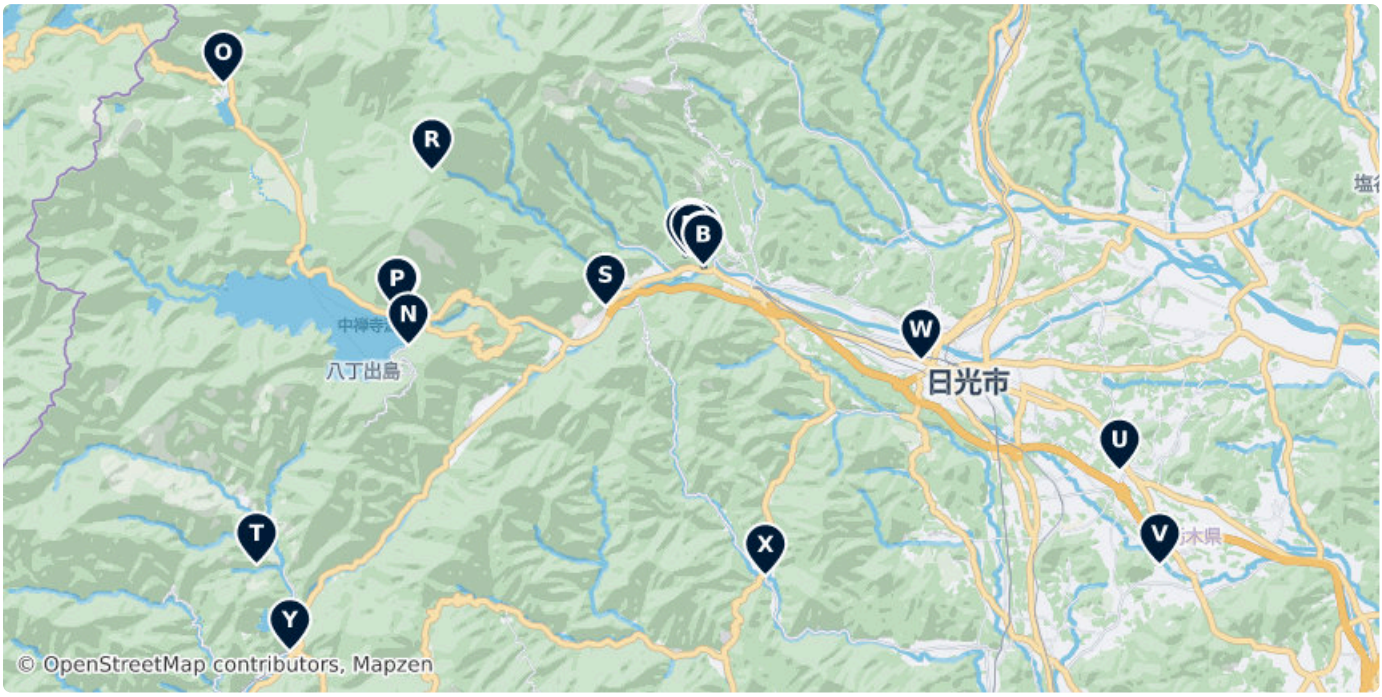
V Hokkedo Hall

A meditation hall of the Tendai sect, connected to the Jogyodo Hall by a covered corridor.

Japan (36.75785, 139.59604)

Shinto Shrines and Buddhist Temples

Nikko's spiritual landscape is defined by the Shrines and Temples of Nikko, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This collection features the opulent Tōshō-gū, the final resting place of Tokugawa Ieyasu, alongside the ancient Rinnō-ji Temple and Futarasan-jinja. These sites showcase the intricate wood carvings and gold leaf of Edo-period architecture, set against a backdrop of ancient cedar forests. The list includes major pilgrimage destinations and secluded mountain shrines that have served as centers of Shinto and Buddhist worship for over 1,200 years.





Ⓐ Tōshō-gū shrine

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Mo–Su Open 24/7

toshogu.jp, +81 288-54-0560



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D Taiyuinbyo Iemitsu Taiyuin Temple

The mausoleum of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu. Its design uses black lacquer and gold leaf to create a more subdued atmosphere than the nearby Toshogu shrine.

Japan (36.75771, 139.59415)

Mo–Su	08:00–17:00

rinnoji.or.jp/temple/taiyuuin/

E Sambutsudo (Hall of Three Buddhas)

The main hall of Rinno-ji Temple, housing three large gold-lacquered wooden statues representing the manifestations of Nikko's three mountain deities.

Nikko, Japan (36.75510, 139.60054)

Mo–Su	Open 24/7

F Futarasan Honden

The inner sanctuary of Futarasan-jinja, built in 1619. It is one of the oldest structures in the shrine complex.

Japan (36.75874, 139.59641)

G Futarasan Haiden

The hall of worship for Futarasan-jinja, where visitors participate in Shinto rituals and offer prayers to the deities of Nikko's mountains.

Japan (36.75846, 139.59640)

Mo–Su	Open 24/7

0288-54-0535

H Hokkedo Hall

A Buddhist hall within the Rinno-ji complex used for Tendai sect rituals and meditation.

Japan (36.75785, 139.59604)

I Shin-yosha shrine

A storehouse within the Toshogu complex that houses three portable shrines (mikoshi) used during the Spring and Autumn Grand Festivals.

Japan (36.75859, 139.59608)

J Taiyū-in Mausoleum

The final resting place of Tokugawa Iemitsu, featuring intricate carvings and a blend of Shinto and Buddhist architectural styles.

Japan (36.75838, 139.59461)

Mo–Su Open 24/7

rinnoji.or.jp/temple/taiyuuin/

K Mitomo Shrine

A small shrine within the Nikko complex dedicated to the deities of marriage and friendship.

Japan (36.75878, 139.59604)

L Daikoku-den shrine

A shrine dedicated to Daikokuten, the deity of fortune and wealth, located within the Futarasan-jinja grounds.

Japan (36.75865, 139.59597)

M Jogyodo Hall

A hall at Rinno-ji Temple dedicated to the practice of walking meditation and chanting to the Amida Buddha.

Japan (36.75764, 139.59633)

N Chuzenji Temple

A temple on the shores of Lake Chuzenji featuring a six-meter-tall statue of Kannon carved directly into a living katsura tree.

Japan (36.73111, 139.49176)

Mo–Su 08:00–17:00

0288-55-0013



O Onsen-ji Temple

A branch of Rinno-ji Temple in the Yumoto Onsen area, featuring a small hot spring bath inside the temple grounds.

(Unnamed Road), Japan (36.80843, 139.42341)

P Futarasan-jinja Shrine Chugu

The middle shrine of the Futarasan-jinja complex, situated on the northern bank of Lake Chuzenji at the trailhead for Mount Nantai.

(36.74166, 139.48757)

Q Futarasan Shrine Treasure House

A museum displaying a collection of swords, armor, and ritual objects designated as Important Cultural Properties of Japan.

Japan (36.74172, 139.48823)

R Futarasanjinja Sizumiya

A remote Shinto shrine located on the hiking path up Mount Nantai, serving as a site for mountain asceticism.

Japan (36.78272, 139.50041)

S 清瀧神社

A local Shinto shrine located in the Kiyotaki district of Nikko.

(36.74267, 139.56455)

T 本山鉱山神社

A shrine established for the miners of the Ashio Copper Mine, dedicated to industrial safety.

Japan (36.66622, 139.43573)

U 松尾神社

A Shinto shrine dedicated to Matsuo-no-kami, the deity of sake brewing and agriculture.

Japan (36.69397, 139.75432)

V 高龗神社

A shrine dedicated to the water deity Takaokami-no-kami, traditionally worshipped for rain and water control.

Japan (36.66609, 139.76913)

W 滝尾神社

An ancient shrine located in the forest behind the main complex, famous for its sacred cedar trees and stone fertility rituals.

Japan (36.72664, 139.68102)

X 黒川神社

A local community Shinto shrine in Nikko.

(Unnamed Road), Japan
(36.66289, 139.62361)

Y 呑龍寺

A Buddhist temple located in the Ashio area of Nikko.

(36.64065, 139.44803)

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