

## Glorious Autumn Colors in Nikko



Nikko in northeastern Tochigi Prefecture has been one of Japan's main religious districts for ages, with many temples and shrines located there, including the well-known Nikko Toshogu Shrine. It is also famous for the numerous scenic spots in the vicinity of Lake

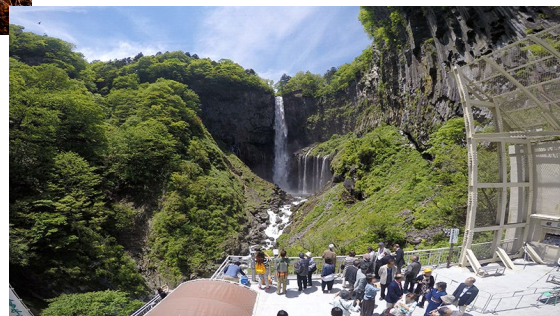
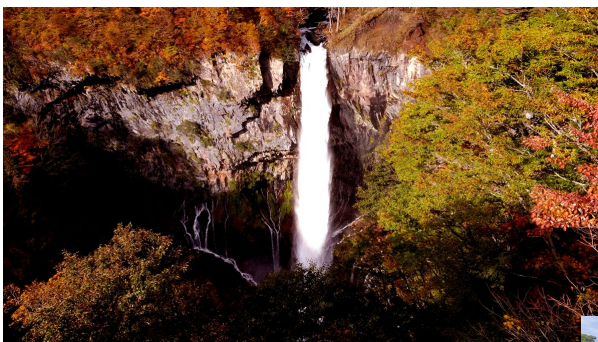
Chuzenji, reached by climbing the steep Iroha Slope. Widely known overseas as well, Nikko has a strong cosmopolitan flavor. By Lake Chuzenji, among other attractions, there are the sites of Italian and UK embassy villas. The rivers, waterfalls, ponds, lakes, and other sites in Nikko all have their own distinctive charms. The autumn colors are superb, and the spectacle of the mountains dyed a bright red and reflected on the surface of the water is wonderful. This time I took a trip northward along the Yagawa River, which flows from the northeastern part of Nikko, known as Okunikko, to Lake Chuzenji.

## 1. Kegon Falls

Video: <https://youtu.be/HbL8sMMVe5M>



Kegon Falls is a 97-meter waterfall at the mouth of Daiya River, which is the only river flowing from Lake Chuzenji. One of the three most beautiful waterfalls in Japan, Kegon Falls can only be described as stirring. On this day I aimed for a time in the early morning when the waterfall would not be shady; luckily there was a rainbow arching over the water. Kegon Falls has several observatory platforms, but the one that lets you go right up to the waterfall basin is most popular. The entrance, with two large elevators, is in the car park by National Route 120. The revenue from admission to this deck is said to amount to 1.5 million yen a day and several hundred million yen a year.





## 2. Lake Chuzenji

Video: <https://youtu.be/IJeupw-sFpA>



Lake Chuzenji is a dammed lake created by an eruption of the volcanic Mt. Nantai about 20,000 years ago. The lake has a circumference of about 27 km and a maximum water depth of 163 m. It has been popular since long ago as a place to escape from the



summer heat. When you ascend the winding Iroha Slope, all of a sudden the view opens up, and the surface of the lake appears. Sightseeing boats, rowing boats, and other vessels busily carry many tourists over the water, and on the shore there are many restaurants and other facilities. When I went down to the lakeside, the mountains on the other side of the lake were dyed a deep red.

## 3. Mt. Hangetsu

Video: <https://youtu.be/MOWrq4mi7E8>

Turning left just before the shore of Lake Chuzenji and climbing a hill, I came to a large car park from where the view was magnificent. Here and there bright red trees glinted through the yellow leaves. This spectacle continued far into the distance. Apparently many sightseers visit here at this time of the year to see the autumn foliage. Midway up the mountain there is an observatory platform from where Lake Chuzenji and Mt. Nantai can be seen.



#### 4. Italian Embassy Villa Memorial Park



The building that appears on the left on the way down Mt. Hangetsu is the Italian Embassy Villa Memorial Park. Although the building does seem old, the large window looking toward the lake catches the eye. It creates a modern atmosphere, making it hard to believe that the villa actually was built in 1928. The villa was used until 20 or so years ago, and the furniture, cutlery, and so on used at that time are on display as they were. Apart from the winter months, admission is possible, so you can get a taste of the atmosphere of those good old days.

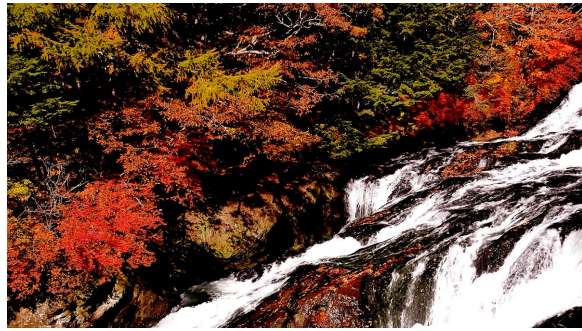
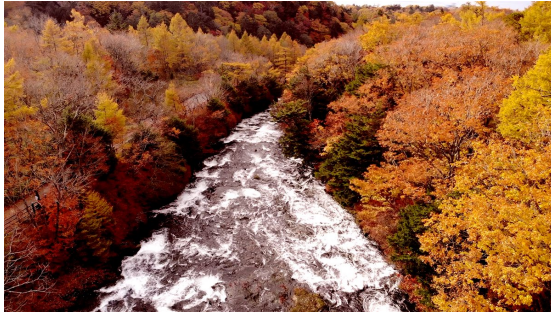
#### 5. Ryuzu Falls

Video: <https://youtu.be/OqyUirWuA3o>

Ryuzu Falls (literally Dragon Head Falls) is a waterfall that seems to be flowing down a gentle slope, with a breadth of about 10 m and length of about 210 m. The name comes from the fact that the twin falls seem to resemble a dragon's head. There is a restaurant at the entrance from where the waterfall can be seen. By the entrance there are stairs that enable you to climb up alongside the waterfall, and you can go right to the top. The



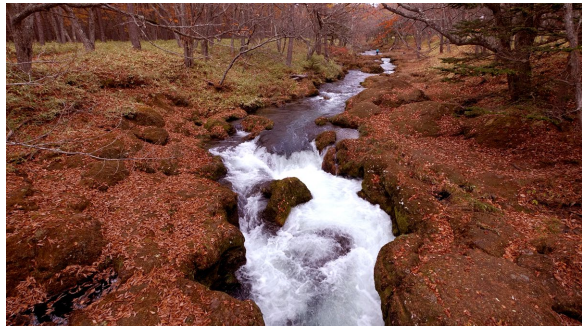
contrast between the bright red foliage glittering around the falls and the pure white cascade of water was so beautiful.



## 6. Senjogahara Marshland and Yugawa River

Video: <https://youtu.be/nATXqzefXos>

Senjogahara Marshland, which spreads out above the Ryuzu Falls, is a marshland covering about 400 hectares. This also was created by the volcanic eruption of Mt. Nantai about 20,000 years ago. The name comes from the fact that mythically in the ancient past the gods of Tochigi Prefecture and Gunma Prefecture disguised themselves as animals and had a battle here. There is a large car park by the national highway from where you can stroll along a trail around the marshland. After walking for



about 10 minutes, you come to the small Shakunage Bridge, from where you can view the beautiful Yugawa River. Whenever I visit Nikko, I always make sure to come here.

## 7. Yudaki Falls

Video: <https://youtu.be/KevLznJttc0>

Further northward, a large car park comes into view on the left. There is a restaurant by this car park, and by this restaurant is Nikko's first convenience store. Going on, you come to a large and well-kept observatory platform from where you can see the Yudaki Falls, with a maximum breadth of 25 m and drop of 70 m. Along with Kegon Falls and Ryuzu Falls, this is one of the three major waterfalls of Nikko. Water from upstream



Lake Yunoko flows immediately into the Yudaki Falls.



## 8. Lake Yunoko

Video: <https://youtu.be/bBrVuG3hWm4>

Situated in the upper reaches of Yugawa River, Lake Yunoko is also a dammed lake, although in this case it was Mt. Mitsudake to the northeast that erupted. I visited in the early morning when the temperature was still low. Dyed a bright red, the foliage was most beautiful. There was no wind, and the reflection of the mountains on the surface of the water was lovely too. Steam fog (a kind of mist occurring on the surface of a lake or sea on bitterly cold mornings) swirled gently across the lake. I was able to take my best video this autumn here.





## 9. Marunuma Swamp

Video: <https://youtu.be/dzU2qmaVwpA>



Although Marunuma Swamp is included in Nikko National Park, it actually lies in Gunma, not Tochigi, Prefecture. On the lakeside there is one old Japanese-style hotel (*ryokan*), which looks a little high-class, and around it are souvenir

shops and the like. Going along the road leading down to the lake from National Route 120, I could see dead trees protruding from the water, creating a rather mysterious atmosphere. The pampas grass by the lakeside swayed, and across the lake I could see the beautiful splash of fall colors on the peninsula.



## Postscript

Nikko, which has been a popular summer retreat for ages, is only about three hours away from Tokyo by car or train. Various scenic spots dot the landscape, and there are many walking trails for those who like strolling around on foot. This time I enjoyed the autumn colors. The red foliage on the mountains was dazzling, and the unceasing flow of water was so refreshing. Without a doubt, Nikko is one of Japan's most representative sightseeing places.

Photos and text: Arata Matsumoto, Sharata and Advise, Inc. (<http://sharata.info/>)

(Sharata supplies 4K videos of outstanding scenery in Japan so that as many people as possible can enjoy it.)