



*Japan is known as one of the world's snowiest places. Its light and fluffy snow makes for some of the best powder skiing.*

powder capital and are celebrated for their wide-open powder bowls, tree runs, access to backcountry, and incredible mountain scenery. The Nagano, Iwate, and Niigata prefectures are also home to resorts that boast incredible powder, like Nozawa Onsen, Hakuba Valley, and Appi Kogen. In the resort of Shiga Kogen, Nagano, the snow season overlaps with the sakura season (cherry blossoms).

Much of Japan's mountain architecture is modern and utilitarian, designed to withstand the heavy snowfall and the footfall of mountain enthusiasts, but some places incorporate traditional Japanese aesthetics. Inside mountain huts, lunchtimes typically consist of steaming bowls of ramen.

As the sun tucks behind the peaks, at many resorts elsewhere in the world, it is time to descend and huddle in huts for après-ski. But in Japan, many resorts offer night skiing, with groomed slopes flooded with artificial light, giving mountain lovers longer on the snow. Whenever you decide to call it a day (or night), *onsen* offer a fantastic way

to unwind and soak your tired muscles. These natural hot springs, warmed by volcanic activity deep below the earth's surface, can range from small pools to large spas.

Evenings are filled with hearty foods, such as *yakiniku* (grilled meats), *shabu-shabu* (a meat and vegetable hotpot dish), *nabe* (a rich hotpot soup), *soba* (buckwheat noodles), *onigiri* (rice balls), and other Japanese and international dishes, followed by a visit to an *izakaya*, a Japanese bar, and perhaps some karaoke.

RIGHT Exploring Hokkaido's snowy lanes around the town of Kimobetsu. OPPOSITE Hokkaido, famed for its powder snow in winter, offers numerous opportunities for skiing and snowboarding. P. 122 Andrzej Bargiel and his team during their Everest Ski Challenge. P. 124 With its many national parks and vast wilderness, Hokkaido is one of Japan's leading outdoor destinations and Mount Yōtei an absolute must-see for snow sports enthusiasts.

