

# Mount Fuji & Hakone, Japan: A Visit to Fuji-San

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Think of Japan and chances are that the images that will pop into your head are things like skyscrapers and the frantic energy of Tokyo, perhaps the legacy left by the attack on Hiroshima, or even for Disney fans, the thought of the Tokyo Disney Resort. One of the images most readily associated with the country is the sight of [Mount Fuji](#) rising above the countryside, usually with snow covering its peak, with the view perhaps framed by cherry blossoms in the spring or beautiful fall-colored leaves.

Having seen many such pictures of this great volcano looming over the landscape, I knew that when we headed to Japan, this was something I had to see. From Tokyo, we didn't have much luck during the first few days we were there. Even the views from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Offices to the west of the city didn't allow us any glimpses of Fuji-san, as the locals call it. However, we were finally rewarded a day or two later, when the skies cleared and suddenly from our room high above Tokyo, we could see its snow-capped peak in the distance.

I was taking no chances and had booked a day trip out to see Mount Fuji to ensure that I got my picture postcard views. The Mount Fuji visitor center is about an hour's drive from Tokyo, and during that time, we learned all about the mysterious mountain. It's 3,776 metres tall (12,388 feet), making it the highest in Japan. A dormant volcano, it last erupted just over 300 years ago, in 1708, and despite all the pictures of Mount Fuji, we were surprised to learn that often it's difficult to get a good view of it due to hazy conditions, particularly in the hot summers.

Sadly, our stop at the visitor center wasn't nearly long enough. We were only given 15 minutes, which only allowed us a few photos with Fuji in the dim distance behind us, barely visible, and a chance to browse the obligatory gift shop. There were films here about the history of Fuji and the nature found there, but we had no time to view them, which was a great shame, as I'd have loved to learn more about its background.

We headed up towards the fifth station of the mountain. In total, there are nine stations between the base and the peak of the mountain, but our hopes of getting up to the fifth station were quickly dashed, as apparently the snow of winter was still blocking the way. Instead, we made it to the fourth station (2,100 metres/6,890 feet). As we got off the bus, I couldn't believe the change in temperature between the visitor center and here. Although the peak of Mount Fuji is covered with

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snow almost year 'round, with the snow only completely disappearing for a few short weeks during the summer, I somehow hadn't expected it to be this cold this far down the mountain.

The changing climate was something I couldn't get over. During July and August, you can hike to the mountain peak or even take part in a marathon to its peak, something our guide told us he'd done more than once. It's not something I'd ever want to try! I was even more impressed by the fact that our guide's mother had climbed Mount Fuji at the ripe old age of 70. Not bad going.

Although the views from the fourth station were beautiful and we had unobstructed views of the peak (something that surprised our guide, leading us to believe we'd been lucky in choosing this day for this trip), better was still to come.

We headed for Hakone, part of the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, which is famous, not just for views of Mount Fuji, but hot springs and outdoor activities, such as boating on beautiful Lake Ashi. This lake was formed around 3,000 years ago, following one of Mount Fuji's eruptions. It's a huge lake, with many huge boats heading across it, taking tourists and locals alike out on the water for some stunning views.

Just 15 minutes later, we were back on dry land for our next stop, taking the Komagatake Ropeway high above Lake Ashi. Romantic as it sounds, it was literally a cable car, and any romance it might have held was quickly destroyed, as we hit the absolute limit of people for the journey back down. I managed to snag a few photos on the way up and just as well as I did, as it was too crowded on the return to even bring a camera up to head level!

Once at the top, we had yet more stunning views of Mount Fuji, but now we could see the peak peeping out through thick cloud below. It looked quite eerie like that and made us feel very grateful that we had such wonderful views earlier on in the day. As we looked down on Lake Ashi below, with golf courses, hotels, and restaurants surrounding it, we could see why this was such a popular get-away for the Japanese, at less than an hour outside the hustle and bustle of Tokyo. I know that if I had views like that so close to where I lived, I'd be heading out there every weekend as well for a slower pace of life and a more beautiful one.

Seeing Mount Fuji had been one of my major ambitions during our visit to this beautiful country, and despite a disappointing start early on in our trip, I could now leave happy, knowing I'd fulfilled my dream. Sadly, the cherry blossoms hadn't cooperated to give me the perfectly framed

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image that I had hoped for, but at least we'd managed to get a glimpse of the beauty that is Mount Fuji.

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

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