

# Japanese Snow Monkeys

Henrietta Preiss reveals the intriguing behaviour of one of Japan's more quaint inhabitants.

Deep in the Japanese Alps of Nagano Prefecture, in the quiet town of Yudanaka, you will find Jigokudani - the apocalyptically named Hell's Valley. This volcanic setting is where the famous Japanese 'snow monkeys' are to be found, huddled together with snow collecting on their heads as they take a dip in the natural hot spring pools for which the region is famed. The monkeys here are the indigenous Japanese macaques, common throughout the country, but this group have gained celebrity status for their unique bathing habits, learned from a single inquisitive female in the 1960s.

Around 150 monkeys frequent the pools here, and though they are still very much wild animals, since appearing in a documentary in the 1970s they have become very used to receiving visitors to their specially constructed outside bath (rotemburo). Here they sit and preen each other, play and while away the cold winter days in the natural, volcanically heated water. Though they remain in the region throughout the summer, the best time to see them is in winter when they are snow-covered and if you are lucky enough, you can take some wonderful photos of them crouched together against the cold.

Yudanaka is only a forty minute train ride from Nagano City. The trail to Monkey Park is a pleasant woodland walk up to the monkeys' favourite pool, following the winding river through the peace and quiet of the Japanese Alps. The area around Yudanaka is dotted with hot spring inns where you can follow the monkeys' lead and soothe away the day's travels in the natural thermal waters. One that I would highly recommend is Seni Onsen, which has natural pools inside the mountains themselves and where guests are treated to exquisite home-cooked delicacies.

**Henrietta Preiss**  
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## FACT FILE

A visit to Yudanaka can be included in a classic tour of Japan's most celebrated destinations. A two-week tour including economy flights would start from £2,200 per person. Please speak to Henrietta, Zoë, Lou or Laura on 01993 838 208 for more details.

