

# Climbers flock to Mt. Fuji as season begins

July 1 2013

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Yamabushi or Japanese Buddhist monks mark the official opening of Mount Fuji climbing season at Murayama Sengen Shrine in Fujinomiya, Shizuoka prefecture on July 1, 2013. Mount Fuji, Japan's national symbol newly inducted as a UNESCO World Heritage site, opened July 1 for a two-month-long climbing season.

Hordes of trekkers flocked to Mount Fuji Monday at the start of a two-month climbing season, after it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in recognition of its status as a symbol of Japan.

Hundreds of hikers began their ascent of the 3,776-metre (12,389-foot) peak before dawn in a bid to stand at the summit to watch the sun rise over the Pacific Ocean.

Waves of climbers, many wearing colourful mountaineering gear, began to crowd the summit around 3:00 am (1800 GMT Sunday).

In a scene sometimes compared to Tokyo's busy morning commuter train stations, climbers packed the routes to the peak.

Torches and lights carried by the trekkers lit up the queue that snaked to the top of the mountain.

Around 4:30 am, the yellow sun gleamed through [tiny cracks](#) in the cloud, prompting chants of "banzai" ("hurrah") among hikers welcoming in the climbing season, TV footage showed.

Others clapped or snapped pictures of each other on mobile phones and cameras.

The cone-shaped volcano has long been worshipped in Japan, attracting pilgrims and followers of the native animistic religion of Shintoism.



Japanese boys stand under a waterfall as part of an annual ceremony marking the opening of the Mount Fuji climbing season in Fujinomiya, Shizuoka prefecture on July 1, 2013.

UNESCO classified the mountain as a "cultural" heritage site, saying it has "inspired artists and poets and been the object of pilgrimage for centuries".

Around 300,000 people climb Mt. Fuji every year, but local tourist officials say this year they expect that number to rise significantly because of its new World Heritage status.



Mount Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan at 3,776 metres (12,460 feet), is seen from Yamanakako village, Yamanashi prefecture on July 1, 2013.

Environmentalists warn such a large number of visitors puts a strain on the mountain, with increased erosion and problems with litter.

Mt Fuji's official climbing season runs from the start of July to the end of August.

Snow-capped for most of the year, the mountain's summit is regarded as one of most dangerous in Japan during the off-season due to its steep slopes and constant gusts.

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