

Avoiding Danger in the Backcountry

National Police Agency

Cases of unfortunate incidents in the mountains are on the rise. People without proper backcountry preparation and/or experience get caught in avalanches or put themselves in danger by becoming disoriented.

Help us prevent such backcountry incidents by observing the following rules and by learning the main dangers associated with the backcountry in Japan, and their causes.

1. Rules to Follow

i. Make thorough preparations ahead of time

If you ski, check your course and the surrounding terrain in advance so that you are able to return to the ski resort or road when you are finished. Videos alone are not a sufficient source of information. If you do not have much experience in the backcountry, think about hiring a qualified guide.

ii. Create an itinerary (communicate your destination)

Share your itinerary or at least inform someone (friends or the accommodation where you are staying) of your destination before your backcountry trip.

iii. Carry the right equipment

a. Avalanche gear: beacon, probe, shovel, airbag, etc.

b. Climbing gear: climbing skins, snowshoes, etc.

c. Navigational tools: GPS, mobile phone, map, compass, etc.

d. Emergency gear: spare phone battery, headlamp, warm clothing, emergency blanket, rations, etc.

iv. Check snow conditions

Do not underestimate the potential dangers of snow; pick an appropriate course taking into account the snow conditions.

v. Check avalanche risks before skiing

Check avalanche information provided at the ski resort and/or perform a snow pit test for weak layers in the snowpack.

vi. Closely follow the rules of the resort

The reason that certain areas are roped off or have warning signs is to prevent avalanches and to keep the average skier/snowboarder out.

Don't just think about yourself but also of others that may be affected by your actions when entering such areas: will other people be caught in an avalanche if you cause one?

Might an unexperienced skier follow your tracks into dangerous areas?

2. Types of Mountain Accidents/Incidents in Japan and their Causes

- Unable to return to a road or ski resort due to not confirming the course/terrain in advance
- Not bringing a map or GPS device and getting lost
- Following another person's tracks and losing one's way
- Getting stuck somewhere due to inexperience/inability
- Unable to climb due to lack of appropriate climbing gear (climbing skins, snowshoes, etc.)
- Injuring oneself by entering a backcountry course beyond one's ability and/or fitness level and colliding with a tree or falling.
- Falling and becoming buried in fresh snow, which can lead to suffocation and death.
- Getting caught in an avalanche caused by either yourself, your friends or other skiing parties.