

SKIING HEAVEN JAPAN



NICHIGO PRESS

jSnow

issue 4 | 2021 | FREE

Stamps Featuring Beautiful Japanese Scenes
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Otaru | Shiga Kogen | Madarao | Aizu | Echigo Yuzawa | Gifu



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JAPAN

– A Haven of the World's Best Powder Snow

Captivating snowy mountains yet to be discovered by ski fans around the world

Major ski resorts in Japan, such as Niseko in Hokkaido, and Hakuba in Nagano, have seen hordes of skiers and snowboarders from overseas flock to them for many years now.

Throughout the years, we wrote about snow and winters in Japan in our publication, *jStyle*, a magazine created to introduce Australian readers to the wonders of Japanese culture and various travel destinations in the country. As time went by, we were granted more and more opportunities to write about snow-related content, leading to increased coverage and eventuated in it becoming a staple feature.

As the content continued to increase, we created *jSnow* in 2017 as a sister publication to *jStyle* featuring all things related to snow. This issue is the fourth one to date.

From the early beginnings of *jSnow* we have consistently gone to lengths to ensure that we get information by personally visiting the locations ourselves. While many publications in this time and age create their content by copying and pasting from various sources, we do not. As the editor-in-chief of this publication, I personally visit, photograph, research, and write almost all of the unique content found in these pages.

I dare say that my love for all things ski-related could easily rival that of the loyal readers of *jSnow* and I have the history to prove it. While I currently live in Sydney, Australia,

I was born in Japan, and enjoyed skiing the slopes of Japan ever since I was a child. Following my graduation from university, I helped to create magazines about skiing and surfing at a publisher for sports content.

It is also a given that after moving to Australia, I have visited Perisher, Thredbo, Mount Buller and other major ski areas, whilst also making a number of trips over to ski resorts in New Zealand. I have visited many ski resorts in the United States and Europe in the past as well.

All of these different areas have their unique charms to endear them to their visitors, but as a self-professed ski maniac, there is an alluring depth in Japanese ski areas that resonates within me, especially after experiencing what the world has to offer. I feel as though the sheer amount of snow and the quality of it simply cannot be readily found in other places on earth.

With my views on snow in mind, I have visited snow slopes all across Japan in my time and I continue to seek out new and unique ski areas to this very day. The ski slopes open to the general public alone make up over 500 of the many ski resorts in the snow wonderland of Japan. The number of areas known to tourists travelling to Japan for ski sports does not compare to the sheer amount in operation. There is still much to be discovered.

We here at *jSnow* not only pride on ourselves visiting the locales, but we have made sure to

focus on introducing our readers to new snowy wonders ever since our inception. Our goal has always been to introduce our readers to new discoveries and continue to invoke a sense of awe with all of our content.

In this issue, the Gifu area will most likely be the most unfamiliar to our readers. It is a destination that is yet to be discovered by most Australians as a prime spot for snow sports. Gifu is also known around the world as a tourist destination, so we will be introducing both of these fascinating aspects to our readers in this edition.

In addition to introducing all new areas, we will also be shedding some light on places already visited by our readers by sharing new information to keep your eyes glued to these fascinating pages.

Unfortunately, while the 2020/21 snow season in Japan has ended and the effects of COVID-19 around the world are still lingering, we can take hope in the fact that the pandemic will not last forever. We want to act as your trusty guide for when you visit Japanese ski resorts in the future that awaits us all and we hope you enjoy this issue of *jSnow*.

I sincerely hope that this publication will help to further enrich your skiing and snowboarding lives!

Publisher & Editor-in-chief: Kazuya Baba



Foil finishing to depict snow and crystals. These sparkling "Winter Greeting" stamps will add some colour to your winter letters. (Design by Yasuko Yamada)



* The stamp images are for illustration purposes only. The actual products may vary.
 * The size of the stamps vary in ratio and size to the actual product.

SNIPPETS OF JAPAN'S WONDERS

Stamps Featuring Beautiful Japanese Scenes

Winter Collection set for release

As a popular locale amongst tourists from around the world in recent years, Japan has become a staple of must-go destinations for budding international travellers.

One of Japan's biggest drawcards is its changing scenery across its distinctive four seasons throughout the year. Visitors are constantly drawn back to the same place in the same region because they are captivated by the stark scenic transformations brought about by the different seasons. The stunning winter wonderland descending upon the mountains

becomes a beautiful cherry-blossom pink in the spring, before the luscious greens of summer are replaced by the blazing red and yellow hues of autumn.

Tourists are treated to vastly different views depending on the time of the year they visit.

Japan Post continues to release many stamps featuring scenic shots of the four seasons of Japan to this day. It also actively

A collection released to coincide with International Letter Writing Week. Both stamps feature *ukiyo-e* paintings by the Edo-period painter, Katsushika Hokusai. Top: *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji - Mount Fuji from the mountains of Totomi*, bottom: *Canary and Peony*. (Design by: Akira Tamaki)

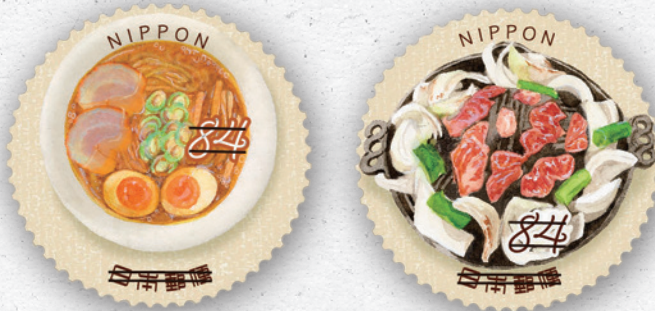


splashes unique aspects of Japanese culture into their stamp collections and regularly releases stamps covering a range of different topics to capture the hearts of avid stamp collectors.

A collection of winter-themed stamps by the stamp-designer, Yasuko Yamada, has been slotted in for release in November 2020.

“The quintessentially winter elements are

This series features Japanese customs and culture as its theme with Japan's national sport, sumo wrestling, the subject of this year. (Designed by: Junko Kaibuchi)



The "Oishii Nippon" (tasty Japan) series, with a focus on Japanese cuisine, has directed its spotlight to the foods of popular ski destination and capital city of Hokkaido - Sapporo. Top-left: Sapporo ramen and *jingisukan* or "Genghis Khan" (a grilled mutton or lamb and vegetable dish). (Design by: Ayumi Yoshikawa)

portrayed in the drawings with foil finishing to depict the snow and crystals. These glimmering stamps will add some colour to your winter letters." (from the official Japan Post press release)

All of the stamps have been designed to the minutest detail and are overflowing with typically Japanese peculiarities. Japan Post's extensive history ensures that its vast ideals have been crafted into these stamps that have been created to their high standards of quality.

As jSnow is a publication that focuses on bringing Japan's winter scene to its readers, we will start your journey into Japan Post's many famous stamp collections by giving you the

HOW TO BUY STAMPS

Stamps can be purchased online via the below Buyee website. Drop by your nearest post office when you visit Japan to see the stamps in person. (Check out the Japan Post website for the latest updates when purchasing stamps as airmail to Australia has been temporarily suspended as of the printing of this issue.)

Shop online: shop.buyee.jp/jp-post

* Please take note as stock may be exhausted.

key to the doorway in the form of the winter-themed collection. This feature will walk you through the different themes covered in these stamps whilst also treating you to the different cultural scenes found in them.

All of the featured stamps can be purchased online and in store. Perhaps now is the perfect opportunity to experience Japan's beautiful four seasons or different cultural aspects of the country through the many stamps printed by Japan Post. Be sure to stop by a local post office and experience the joy of picking out stamps to send postcards off to your family and friends when the borders open for your next trip to Japan. ■



The Ultimate Paradise for Skiers at Hoshino Resorts

Enjoy the best powder snow in Japan
at Hoshino Resorts TOMAMU and OMO7 Asahikawa



A belt of powder snow stretching across central Hokkaido from north to south

The “Hokkaido Powder Belt” refers to an area of central Hokkaido, stretching from north to south, that has been gaining popularity in recent years for producing some of the best powder snow to be had in Japan. Hoshino Resorts, a renowned hotel and resort operator in Japan, has been leading the effort to spread the word about the wonders of central Hokkaido with a particular focus on the Powder Belt.

Asahidake, amongst a range of other ski resorts in the area, springs to mind when referring to parts of the Powder Belt popular amongst hardcore ski-fans and places

worshipped as off-piste havens. Within this prominent belt of powder snow is the Hoshino Resorts-operated OMO7 Asahikawa located near Asahikawa Airport. Asahikawa, situated in the northern region of the Powder Belt, is the second largest city in Hokkaido and Hoshino Resorts has set up an establishment here to take advantage of the perfect location to send guests off to the surrounding ski fields.

Over on the southern portion of the Powder Belt is Hoshino Resorts TOMAMU. Tomamu features tree runs and other off-piste courses, permitted for experts only, that offer the ultimate powder snow experience amongst hardcore skiers and snowboarders, whilst also gaining popularity amongst families and casual snow sports enthusiasts for featuring equally

as fulfilling courses. This feature article will place spotlights on both areas to show off their various charms as well as offering handy information about their surrounds.

An independent luxury resort — Hoshino Resorts TOMAMU

Tomamu is an independent ski resort run by Hoshino Resorts, a renowned Japanese hotel and resort operator. This massive resort in Hokkaido offers one of the best luxurious stays in all of Japan and features: two hotels on its expansive grounds; over 25 restaurants, cafés, and bars; Chapel on the Water, one of three chapels designed by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando; the largest indoor wave pool in



Over on the southern portion of the Powder Belt is Hoshino Resorts TOMAMU.

Japan—Mina-Mina Beach; the open-air public bath Kirin no Yu and three other spa treatment facilities; and a range of other facilities.

Two accommodation facilities can be found on the grounds. Tomamu the Tower caters to a range of needs, such as families with children, whilst RISONARE Tomamu is a five-star hotel with a whirlpool bath with a view and private saunas in all of its suite rooms that boast over 100 square metres of space each. Guests staying at either of the hotels have access to facilities across both of them, as well as the ability to ski in and ski out.

Guests of independent ski resorts tend to generally enjoy their stays within the resort grounds, and Hoshino Resorts TOMAMU has constructed an addition to enhance the resort experience. In 2017, Hotalu Street was built to take advantage of the mountain's slope and features nine different places to eat, drink, and shop. The shops and restaurants on this street are connected by an approximately 160-metre-long wooden deck. It goes without saying that the restaurants are plentiful and can be visited at night, but what makes this street stand out is that its location on the ski field makes it possible for skiers and snowboarders to visit this little town on their shred down the mountain.

Hotalu Street is a five-minute walk from both the Tower and RISONARE Tomamu, and enhances stays at Tomamu greatly for the ability to visit briefly during a ski, or for more

leisurely jaunts after skiing or snowboarding sessions. Some establishments on the street do change over time, however, there are always popular Hokkaido institutions to be found there, making it a focal point for Japanese gourmards as well. This street allows guests to enjoy the ultimate resort stay whilst also experiencing the latest trending restaurants, making it a great attraction in Tomamu.

The Ice Village is a night-time sight to see and enjoy during a stay at Tomamu. This village is only available during winter and features: the Ice Chapel, where weddings can be held; the Ice Hotel with beds, sofas, and other items made out of ice; as well as an ice slippery dip, ice skating rink, an ice bar, shops, and a variety of other icy establishments. Guests are also treated to fireworks displays from 7:30 PM every night.

It's easy to get swept away by these wonderful facilities, but one of the main drawcards of Tomamu is how accommodating it is as a ski resort. The resort touts itself as "the most family-friendly ski resort in Japan", and rightfully so. It features many courses that families with children can enjoy stress-free, such as those amongst the trees that are suitable for children. For those who opt not to ski or snowboard, there is the It is called as UNKAI Terrace in spring, summer and autumn.

The Same place in winter, called Terrace of Frost Trees, just off the gondola chair lift stop, which is an observation deck where visitors can gaze upon the trees glittering with white light from the frost and the magnificent view of the snowy mountains, as well as other facilities to get the most out of winter in the great outdoors.

Hardcore skiers will be particularly pleased to have access to off-piste areas, designed for advanced skiers and snowboarders, as they are open for those who dare to step foot in

them. These off-course areas are generally outside of the jurisdiction of the ski resort, however, by pre-registering at the Powder Area Registration Desk and receiving an arm band, unlimited access is permitted at no extra cost. The expanse of these open areas means there is a high chance of being able to experience the ultimate, untouched powder snow the next day following a night's worth of snowfall.

Making the trip over to other ski slopes is another fun option whilst staying in Hoshino Resorts TOMAMU. Staying at Tomamu allows access to a range of ski fields that would otherwise be difficult to venture into if based in the northern vicinity of the Powder Belt. Twenty kilometres to the east is Sahoro Resort, which is known for its excellent quality snow and tendency to have clear skies. The popular Furano is also within convenient reach to visit as well. Tomamu is a highly-recommended ski resort to set up base for a new trip to conquer the ski slopes of Hokkaido.





OMO7 Asahikawa is leading the way in showing off all the joys of a ski trip based in the city of Asahikawa.

Shred the slopes and then hit the town during a stay at OMO7 Asahikawa

Asahikawa, situated approximately 30-minutes away from Asahikawa Airport, is the second largest city in Hokkaido and known for boasting an excellent location as the gateway to the Powder Belt. It is in this fine city that Hoshino Resorts operates OMO7 Asahikawa, a unique hotel that provides a variety of services in an effort to promote Asahikawa as a city of skiing.

While there are many advantages to staying in Asahikawa, one of the biggest is that the products and services here are not priced exorbitantly as they would be for resort-goers since it is a city where locals go about their daily lives. Ski resorts, with their growing number of overseas guests, fall into the habit of offering “tourist prices”, whereas a large city filled with locals has prices that are local-friendly.

Staying in a city also comes with the added perk of all there is to be enjoyed after a skiing session, especially in the entertainment district of Asahikawa featuring over 1,000 dining and shopping establishments.





OMO7 Asahikawa is leading the way in showing off all the joys of a ski trip based in the city of Asahikawa. The city is surrounded by a number of ski fields, from large ski resorts, to local ones with amazing open sidecountry areas such as Kamui Ski Links, and the world-famous backcountry paradise of Asahidake. What makes these ski slopes all the more appealing is that guests at OMO7 Asahikawa have access to free transport to and from them. Asahidake is popular amongst hardcore skiers, but tourists can also take the ropeway up to get close to the area where the volcanic smoke rises.

Back at OMO7 Asahikawa, skiers and snowboarders can converse amongst themselves in the lounge, or drop by the WAX BAR for some gear maintenance and choose from one of 30 different types of snow wax to suit various types of snow textures and temperatures. The WAX BAR is free to use for all guests.



For a unique service offered by OMO7 Asahikawa, look no further than OMO Rangers. OMO Rangers refers to a service where members of staff with vast knowledge about the city act as guides, on their area of specialty, for guests at the hotel. There are a range of tours, such as: trips around the city to





taste the different, famous ramens; an izakaya (Japanese pub) crawl with fellow skiers and snowboarders in the hotel's surrounds; or a day spent learning about the culture of Asahikawa. Tap into the knowledge bank of the OMO Rangers to learn about everything Asahikawa has to offer.

Examples of the different places the Rangers may take guests include: a trip to a fabric-maker to explore the city's crafty side; a visit to a cheese-maker to try out some of the city's famous products; or dropping by the gallery of Hiroshi Abe, a famous local author of picture books. Guests can delve

deep into the wonders of Asahikawa that only locals know about.

Hiroshi Abe has written and drawn over 130 books featuring animals and originally worked for 25 years as a zookeeper at Asahiyama Zoo, which is known as one of the best zoos in Japan. Guests should definitely hang up their ski boots for a day during a stay here to visit Asahiyama Zoo. This zoo has visitors coming back time and time again to see the lively and active animals, not often found at other zoos, due to the unique habitats Asahiyama has created to suit them. A stay at OMO7 Asahikawa is sure to enhance any trip to the city. ■



OMO7 ASAHIKAWA
KAMUI ■ ASAHİYAMA ZOO ■
ASAHIKAWA AIRPORT ■ ASAHIDAKE ■
SAPPORO ■ FURANO ■ SAHORO ■
NEW CHITOSE AIRPORT ■ TOMAMU ■ OBIHIRO AIRPORT ■

HOSHINO RESORTS TOMAMU
Nakatomamu, Shimukappu-mura,
Yufutsu-gun, Hokkaido
Tel: +81-167-58-1111
Web: snowtomamu.jp/winter/en

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OTARU – Hokkaido

Situated 30 – 40 minutes by train from Sapporo, the largest city in the snow paradise of Hokkaido, lies the historically-rich port city of Otaru. As a port city, Otaru has acted as a historical gateway to international cultures, leading to the cultivation of its mysterious, yet intriguing, allure through the menagerie of Japanese and international cultures found within. The atmosphere of the city has a wonderfully retro feel to it, which has started to draw in international tourists in recent years. There are many ski resorts in the city's surrounds accessible to those who choose to set up base in Otaru. A trip to visit various ski resorts whilst spending your days in this atmospheric town is sure to be a treat to seasoned travellers alike.

While there are many ski resorts in close vicinity of Otaru, the resort that should top your list of places to go is one that is located practically behind Otaru station—Otaru Tenguyama Ski Resort. It is well loved as a local ski resort and has fostered a fair number of local-grown professional skiers. It may be a small ski resort, but it boasts a surprisingly-difficult ski course that will convince all as to how the snow-savvy children in the area have earned their ski chops. Kiroro, Asarigawaonsen, and other major ski resorts may be in close quarters, but a trip to Otaru Tenguyama just can't be beat during your stay in the area.

Moving onto sightseeing in the area, the most famous sight of them all has to be Otaru Canal. The sight of the stonework





warehouses, built almost a century ago, lining the canal is breathtakingly nostalgic. Its wondrous night views hark back to days gone by when the area once prospered with trade. Be sure to pay a visit to Otaru Canal both during the day and night to experience both of the beautiful sights.

The cityscape of Otaru still features a number of historical buildings, such as the Bank of Japan's Otaru branch. A fun way to enjoy your stay in Otaru would be to visit the different historical buildings, and old railways in the city in between trips to

surrounding ski resorts.

Otaru is also well known as a city of handicrafts. Famous chocolatiers, glasswork stores, music-box stores, and other such delights and crafts can be found here. Dropping by each of these specialty stores is sure to make for hours of fun. Spend your days off experiencing the hip, retro-Japanese culture in the town, whilst visiting nearby ski resorts to get your snow-fix during your stay in Otaru.

A stay in Otaru is sure to be filled with fun for travellers from all walks of life. ■

The cityscape of Otaru still features a number of historical buildings, such as the Bank of Japan's Otaru branch.



Orgel Doh

“Otaru Orgel Doh” is the largest music box specialty store in Japan. In the classical building, we display and sell 3,400 types for a total of 25,000 items.

The Museum Hall No.2 is an antique museum in which free performances on an Aeolian Pipe Organ are given six times a day.

It would make a great memory of your trip to Hokkaido, Otaru!



Otaru Orgel Doh Main Hall

4-1, Sumiyoshi-cho, Otaru

TEL : +81-134-22-1108

[Opening Hours] 9:00a.m.-6p.m.

The day before a national holiday, Friday, Saturday:

9:00a.m.-7:00p.m.

(Only in Summer)

Otaru Music Box Museum Hall No. 2 Antique Museum

6-13, Sakaimachi, Otaru

Furano Orgel Doh

Higashirokugou3, Furano

Music box & Handicrafts Studio You-Kobo

1-1-5, Irifune, Otaru

Hakodate Orgel Doh

BAY Hakodate No.2 Hall, 11-5, Toyokawa-cho, Hakodate

https://www.otaru-orgel.co.jp/english/e_index.html





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While there are still restrictions on travel by air due to COVID-19, consider taking a flight with All Nippon Airways (ANA) when you decide to head to the snowy mountains of Japan once the borders open. ANA is the only Japanese airline to have achieved the exclusive 5-star status for 8 consecutive years by the UK-based airline service research company, SKYTRAX. ANA offers detailed Japanese hospitality that has earned the airline praise and fans from around the world.

Facets of Japan can be found all across the services ANA offers, from the in-flight entertainment, to the in-flight meals, giving your trip to Japan the best start you could have by immersing you in Japanese culture from the moment you step onboard. The airline is also well known for painting its aircraft in designs such as notable characters from the popular movie franchise, *Star Wars*. These themed aircraft also feature matching interior designs and lighting to build on the movie theme and bring joy to fans of the series and regular passengers alike.

Unfortunately, as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic, passengers are unable to experience the full benefits of the excellent service provided by ANA. However, despite the strict adherence to rules of wearing masks, sterilising, and maintaining social distancing across all locations such as at check-in counters, lounges, and on the plane, the airline strives to do everything possible to ensure all of these efforts are carried out in a smooth and natural manner. Please find below a link with more information regarding ANA's coronavirus initiatives:



■ A New Standard for Air Travel

Web: www.ana.co.jp/en/jp/topics/coronavirus-travel-information/

DEPART AT NIGHT TO CONQUER JAPAN'S SNOWY MOUNTAINS THE NEXT MORNING

One of the reasons ANA is a popular choice for flights to Japan is its offering of time-efficient travel. Travellers with their eye on skiing in Japan are particularly pleased with the option to depart Australia at night and arrive in Tokyo (Haneda Airport) the next morning. Skiers can find themselves atop a snowy mountain in popular ski destinations such as Hokkaido, Nagano, or Niigata by noon, at the latest, regardless of their mode of transport from Haneda Airport due to the early-morning arrival time and the ease of transfers.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, ANA offered two flights a day on the Sydney – Tokyo (Haneda) route, as well as opening up the Perth – Tokyo (Narita) route starting September 2019. While restrictions have reduced the Sydney – Tokyo route to five flights a week, it was possible to reach Chitose Airport in Sapporo, the entry point to the popular ski area of Niseko, by 8:30 AM the next morning upon taking the night flight from Sydney, according to the previous timetable. An 8:15 AM arrival at Asahikawa Airport, the entry point to the Central Hokkaido area that has been gaining popularity of late, was also feasible. The ability to get a good night's rest on the plane to arrive at a ski resort by the next morning is only made possible with the small time difference between Japan and Australia, and by taking advantage of the services offered by ANA.

Everyone is waiting in anticipation for this service to resume as soon as possible once the international borders reopen.

CHECK-IN YOUR GEAR AT NO EXTRA COST

Unlike casual snow-sports enthusiasts who have no problem with renting gear at their destinations, hardcore skiers and snowboarders prefer to bring along their own gear, even when they fly overseas. Such travellers will, no doubt, be happy to hear that ANA offers checking in of ski gear at no extra cost.



With ANA, passengers flying in Economy Class can check in two pieces of baggage weighing up to 23 kilograms each. Of these two pieces, one can be switched over to a piece of ski gear measuring up to 292 centimetres in the total linear dimensions. Business class passengers also receive two pieces of baggage up to 32 kilograms each. The luxury of checking in a large piece of ski gear at no extra cost is a huge advantage of flying with ANA.

FULLY-FLAT SEATS IN BUSINESS CLASS

ANA also has a well-established reputation for offering superior in-flight facilities. At even Economy Class level, adjustable foot rests and USB ports can be found to make the flying experience more comfortable and convenient. Moving up to Premium Economy brings even wider seats and larger LCD monitors to maximise the joys of the in-flight entertainment featuring movies and games.

A perk of flying on Premium Economy Class and above is access to ANA's lounge, featuring their renowned service and food options, as well as priority check-in.

Business Class offers a spacious seating layout where all seats have aisle access and can also lie fully flat for the ultimate journey in the skies. Having a laid-back night in the near-private space of your seat will set you up to hit the ski resorts the next day at full throttle. ■



Japan's largest
ski resort near
the beloved
snow monkeys
– Shiga Kogen

SHIGA KOGEN





HAVE THE ULTIMATE RESORT EXPERIENCE AT OKUSHIGA

Nagano prefecture boasts a myriad of popular ski resorts, such as Hakuba, and Nozawa Onsen. It also happens to be home to the largest ski resort in all of Japan with over 50 gondola lifts—Shiga Kogen. This ski resort is not only the biggest, but is also located at the highest altitude of all Japanese ski resorts with lift access. Shiga Kogen has the unique characteristic of having most of its ski areas located deep within the mountains at over 1,500-metres in altitude. Often, when snow conditions are less than desirable at other ski resorts in the same prefecture, Shiga Kogen can have amazing snow to shred up. The potential for the best powder snow, coupled with the amount of time it will take to conquer all of

the expansive areas means it would be wise to consider an extended stay here to experience everything the resort has to offer.

Shiga Kogen's location deep within the snow-rich mountains means that there are no towns close to the resort, however, there are many unique accommodation facilities in the area to make up for this. One of the most renowned areas in Shiga Kogen that offers the ultimate resort experience is Okushiga, which is found deep within the region.

Due to its location deep within Shiga Kogen, and the necessity to traverse many other courses to reach it from the centre of the region, many visitors never make their way to Okushiga when they visit on short trips to the region. When compared to central Shiga Kogen, where

Grand Phenix



Grand Phenix



large-scale ski resorts are concentrated and plentiful, Okushiga offers a far more relaxed experience, allowing visitors to bat away the crowds of the other areas and cruise around this quieter one. Okushiga also has a cult-following as it offers the best long-run courses in the area. The chances of you going to sleep on a snowy night and waking up to top-class powder snow the next morning are also quite high.

There are a variety of drawcards to the courses found here. From courses featuring slopes as sheer as 30 degrees to challenge expert snow-sport enthusiasts, to gentle long courses for beginners and kids to enjoy, there's something to keep everyone entertained. The areas just off the chair lifts offer fun powder-snow courses following snowfall, and a Japanese ski magazine has also visited the area to take photos for a special feature on powder-run techniques for this very reason. Okushiga can be separated into two areas, one that has a gondola to take you straight up to the top for those who want to shred run after run, and the other featuring a medium slope for those who want to enjoy a high-speed shred down.

The neighbouring Yakebitai area, connected at the mountain's peak, also features a variety of

courses with two gondola lifts servicing them. Setting up base in Okushiga Kogen whilst also visiting Yakebitai is already a full day's worth of fun in itself. It is very much possible to move on to other areas from there, but the sheer size of the area means you would have to draw up an organised schedule to ensure that you make it back in time. There are shuttle buses constantly in operation in Shiga Kogen, so that back-up option is always there if your plans go awry.

There is also the Shiga International Ski School in Okushiga offering skiing and snowboarding lessons for kids and adults, taught by international instructors, so you can rest at ease if snow sports are not your forte.

While the ski runs are highly appealing in their own rights, the biggest, unique drawcards of this area are the two hotels at the bottom of the slope offering ski-in ski-out facilities.

One of the hotels is known as the finest resort hotel in the area—Hotel Grand Phenix Okushiga. This long-renowned, hotel of nobility is loved by famous guests such as the Japanese royal family, and is also frequented by the world-renowned conductor, Seiji Ozawa. This prestigious guest list exemplifies the exceedingly spectacular accommodation



Okushiga also has a cult-following as it offers the best long-run courses in the area.



Grand Phenix



Grand Phenix



Okushiga Kogen Hotel



Okushiga Kogen Hotel

experience this establishment offers. The guest rooms have been made with comfort in mind and feature wood in abundance to create a calming atmosphere, whilst the convenience of ski-visitors has also been considered with all rooms featuring walk-in closets. Guests here don't have to worry about where to put their ski gear when they arrive for the ski season. Inside the hotel are three restaurants sourcing prized ingredients from all over Japan, such as the gourmet trove of Shinshu, as well as all over the world. These restaurants offer Italian, Japanese, and Chinese cuisine to tantalise your tastebuds. The lounge bar is also popular amongst guests who enjoy gathering around the large fireplace to chat the night away. There is nothing quite as luxurious as having a drink by the fire and soaking up the air of opulence after a skiing session. With an indoor heated swimming pool, and an open-air hot spring for a private soaking, Hotel Grand Phenix Okushiga offers a variety of facilities for all guests to enjoy their stays.

The second hotel is the Okushiga Kogen Hotel. This hotel is directly operated by Okushiga Kogen Ski Resort, and features a variety of lavish facilities such as spacious rooms, an open-air hot spring to gaze upon the great outdoors, and even its own lounge bar with a fireplace, making it rival the Grand Phenix in its own right. Guests can choose from three different restaurants serving French cuisine, Japanese cuisine, or *teppanyaki* (where the chef cooks in front of patrons seated at the hot-plate counter).

Both of these hotels are popular for capturing the atmosphere of a European ski resort, whilst also offering the quintessentially Japanese custom of comprehensive hospitality. Many guests visit either of the hotels to sit back and relax at their respective lounges oozing elegance and enjoy the fireplaces ablaze. As a rule of thumb, for those who are after a quiet

experience to bask in their time of luxury—choose the Grand Phenix; for those looking for a casual lounge experience whilst listening to some music—head to the Okushiga Kogen Hotel. While the Grand Phenix allows guests in their lounge to enjoy their time in peace and quiet without interruptions, the Okushiga Kogen Hotel organises for pianists to play in their lounge area. Both hotels offer different experiences to cater to different guests.

As the two hotels are within walking distance of each other, guests can enjoy the offerings at the restaurants and lounges of either hotel during their stay. For the ultimate experience in Shiga Kogen, make plans to set up base at Okushiga and take full advantage of the area's numerous charms. ■

Okushiga Kogen Hotel



OKUSHIGA KOGEN RESORTS

Okushiga Kogen Ski Resort is located in the northern region of Nagano prefecture, Japan and brings many smiles to the faces of skiers and snowboarders for its plentiful, outstanding powder snow. The hotel is filled with various activities and top chefs to make the resort the ideal place to enjoy your holiday.

JAPAN POWDER



Powder snow in Japan is known as “JAPAW” and is extremely light. The powder snow that falls in Okushiga Kogen is known for its particularly high quality.

KIDS SCHOOL



There is a ski and snowboard school run by international staff on the grounds, complete with lessons for children to ensure a safe and fun experience for the whole family.

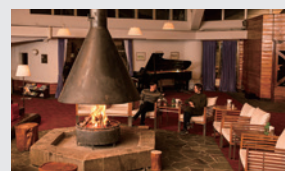
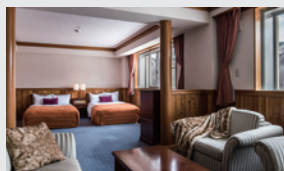
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CLASSIC RESORT HOTEL

OKUSHIGA KOGEN HOTEL



Okushiga Kogen Hotel is the perfect resort for skiers and snowboarders looking for a classic ski-in, ski-out experience. The 3 different restaurants and variety of different activities inside the hotel will ensure a fun-filled experience both on and off the ski slopes.



OKUSHIGA KOGEN HOTEL
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OKUSHIGA KOGEN RESORTS

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The English speaking ski guide is available.



SMIGA





A NEW GATEWAY TO SHIGA



One piece of trending news to come out of Shiga Kogen is the long-awaited completion of the gateway to Shiga, the Yama-no-eki resort gondola chair lift. Shiga Kogen acts as the base for many visitors staying in the various major hotels dotted amongst the expansive resorts in the areas occupying it. While each of these areas are filled with their own unique charms, it would be near on impossible to visit all of the courses available when planning a short stay in just one of the areas, until now. The 2020/21 ski season saw the much-anticipated

completion of the Yama-no-eki resort gondola chair lift. Yama-no-eki had originally served as a hub with shops, restaurants, and a bus stop, however, a downside of it was that it lacked easy access to a vital mainstay of the region—the ski slopes. The completion of the gondola chair lift now provides direct access from here to the central area of Shiga Kogen. This location may now very well act as the base station Shiga never had and provide a gateway to various areas in the region.

Yama-no-eki serves as an excellent gateway to the ski fields. Here you can find a restaurant, souvenir shop, convenience store, and an

Villa Alpen Shigakogen

We are a small family-run rustic lodge where you can really feel at home.

- >Capacity of 85p, clean and safety, accessible rooms also available.
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The closest ski area to the snow monkey park



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www.villa-alpen.com/index_e.htm



8593VILL



The Giant Area is an extremely steep course that can challenge even adept skiers and snowboarders.

variety of other slopes to challenge you on your journey down. Travelling via this area or the Nishitateyama area, which is home to the World Cup course, makes for smooth access to the central area with runs such as the Ichinose Family slope or the Takamagahara Mammoth course. This central area has a well-balanced layout with the steeper courses, for more advanced skiers and snowboarders, in the upper region, and comparatively more relaxed courses towards the bottom. On the other side of the mountain, opposite the central area, is a hidden treasure known as the Terakoya course, which is said to have the best powder snow in all of Shiga Kogen.



information centre, as well as free parking for approximately 500 cars, a ticket counter, snow gear rental, lockers, and changing rooms.

The gondola chair lift provides direct access from Yama-no-eki to the Giant Area, which is the main area connecting 15 ski slopes for smooth and easy movement between them. The Giant Area is an extremely steep course that can challenge even adept skiers and snowboarders, and is known as the most difficult slope in all of Shiga Kogen. Taking a single chair lift from the Giant Area can bring you to the Higashitateyama area, which boasts the longest run in the entire resort featuring gentle to steep inclines, moguls, and

Over in Ichinose in the central area is the Ichinose Diamond Snowcan rental shop where there is a foreign exchange cash machine accepting 12 different currencies. Make sure you take note of this location to save you in a pinch, as there are some cases where credit cards cannot be used and you need to have cash on hand.

Back at Yama-no-eki, on the opposite area to the central ski hub, are a number of smaller, yet very much charming courses such as Maruike, which is known as the “Mogul Training Grounds” for its bumpy slopes, Hasuike,

and Sun Valley. While there a number of accommodation facilities in this area vying for top place in the popularity stakes, Villa Alpen, in particular, sees many Australian guests frequent it. The owner of this establishment is Hideo Okazawa, a former pro-skier who is endearingly known as “Cap” amongst returning guests. While the facilities at Villa Alpen may be dated, the hotel continues to expand its fan base by providing a cosy bar with a fireplace, early check-in and late check-out options, and other careful considerations to ensure that guests have comfortable and worthwhile stays there. One such example of these



considerations is that the hotel features fully-accessible rooms, to keep it up-to-date with the changing times, despite its age. Villa Alpen is also accredited by the National Tax Agency, allowing foreign ambassadors, public officials, and other such staff to stay without being subjected to the 10% consumption tax.

Heading down the Shiga Kogen mountain leads to a popular tourist attraction—the snow

monkeys. Travelling from other ski fields in Nagano prefecture would take a whole day to see the snow monkeys, but a trip from Shiga Kogen is barely a trek at all. Located 40 minutes from Shiga Kogen is the hot-spring area of Yudanaka Shibu Onsen, with its atmospheric townscape. Shiga Kogen can be accessed via bus from this hot spring town, providing the option of perhaps staying a few nights here. ■



New Pulse Gondola opening winter 2020

Shiga Kogen Yamano-eki New Gateway in Shiga Kogen

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The greatest side country haven in Japan with family-friendly options – MADARAO

Madarao Kogen has been gaining in popularity in recent years as one of the more edgy ski resorts in Nagano prefecture. Its biggest drawcard is the fact that it boasts the most sidecountry and tree-run courses on offer in all of Japan, and they just so happen to be accessible by ski lifts.

Many ski resorts in Japan prohibit entry to areas off specified courses. There are also a number of resorts that allow guests to head into sidecountry areas “at one’s own risk” as there is a high risk of being stranded and there is no way to patrol these areas. When it comes to Madarao, however, these sidecountry courses are actively opened to visitors to shred.

While there are many ski resorts that cannot tend to their off-piste areas due to

government restrictions, such as regulations surrounding national parks, Madarao is not subjected to any of these. In fact, the operators of Madarao Kogen have taken the stance of pushing the ski resort as a place that welcomes all lovers of powder snow and tree runs.

The resort goes to various lengths to ensure that guests can enjoy these off-piste areas: from reducing the risk of danger by thinning the trees to make it easier to ski, to placing equipment for snow-sport lovers to use.

All of the courses can be accessed via

ski lifts, however, what makes Madarao so appealing is the ability to hike up through backcountry areas on a regular day to see breathtaking views.

Madarao is broadly split into two main areas. The Tangram Ski Circus Resort offers a family-friendly, unique appeal in addition to the side featuring the plentiful sidecountry courses. Whether you’re looking for a family experience or a hardcore skiing trip, one of Madarao’s biggest allures is its depth and versatility to cater to all guests.





Another attention-grabber is the area's great location. Setting up base in Madarao would be a great way to efficiently visit the other popular ski areas in Nagano prefecture. This is because Madarao is situated right in the middle of popular ski resorts and tourist destinations, making it a 40-minute trip to visit attractions such as Nozawa, Myoko, and the snow monkeys. In the surrounds of Madarao Kogen Ski Resort (which facilitates ski-in, ski-out trips) are a number of new restaurants and bars within walking distance, making a stay there even more fun-filled.

From a visit to Madarao whilst staying in popular destinations such as Nozawa or Myoko, to discovering a new area bursting with charm by staying in Madarao itself, be sure to jot this location down on your list of places to visit. ■

Setting up base in Madarao would be a great way to efficiently visit the other popular ski areas in Nagano prefecture.



 Madarao.jp

 info@madarao.jp

 [@madaraoski](https://www.facebook.com/madaraoski)

 [@the-madarao](https://twitter.com/the-madarao)



5 reasons why you should visit Madarao Mountain Resort



1 Top quality powder snow and glade-skiing runs.

2 Easy access - 1 hour and 50 minutes from Tokyo by Shinkansen and 20 minutes from the Shinkansen station by bus or car.

3 Close to neighbouring ski slopes (40 minutes to both Nozawa Onsen and Myoko Kogen). Madarao is a great place to set up base and take day trips to surrounding resorts.

4 Enjoy the ease of the Ski In Ski Out access at the main hotels - Madarao Kogen Hotel, Monaile Madarao and Hotel Tangram.

5 Walk and taste foods around the village



PHOTO GALLERY

A region full of beautiful hidden treasures – AIZU

We have been sent through some amazing pictures by KEI, a local guide who knows all the ins and outs of the Aizu region. While the number of visitors to this region from Australia has continued to increase, with the help of *jSnow*'s coverage of it in every issue since the publication's inception, it still maintains its charm as a place full of many little-known hidden treasures when compared to major areas, such as Hokkaido and Nagano.

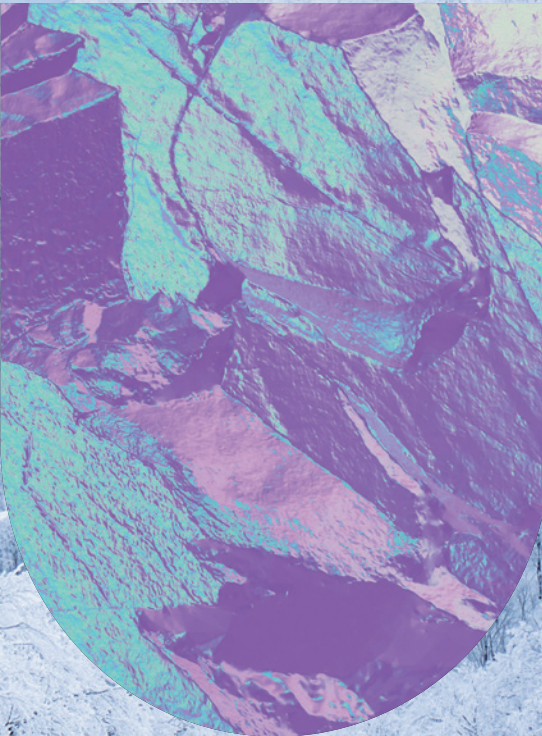


A wintery world of black and white. The geographically-blessed Aizu region shows off a side different to Hokkaido and Nagano during the snow season. The mountains draped in crisp air constantly welcome in fresh snow.

Photo: FREERUN MAGAZINE
Location: NEKOMA

The view of the frozen lake as seen from the peak of the mountain at Nekoma. As can be discerned by its two months enclosed in ice from January to March, the temperatures found in this area bring about amazing snow.

Photo: Jeremy Black/MINT TOURS
Location: NEKOMA



The Aizu region is situated approximately three hours away from Tokyo, making it easily accessible, whilst also offering powder snow to rival even that of Hokkaido due its inland climate creating the ideal conditions for it. Throw in the appeal of the ever-spacious and never-crowded ski slopes and you really have no excuse not to drop by for a visit.

A total of 22 variety-packed ski resorts make up the vast region. One great piece of trending news to come out of last year was the creation of easy access between Alts Bandai, the area's largest ski resort, and Nekoma, which is said

to offer the highest-quality snow in the area. While the two ski resorts are situated on opposing sides of the same mountain and share the same peak, there was no direct route for the general public to freely travel between them in the past. A new route has been established to facilitate the safe and convenient passage between the two slopes.

Passage from one of the ski resorts to the other originally required a trip by car taking over 30 minutes, making this long-awaited news a welcome addition for fans of Aizu all around. Continue along your Aizu journey by enjoying the following photos capturing the beauty of the region.



Experiencing the serene atmosphere on a hike through the primeval Japanese beech forest. Picking up the pace on the hike up as excitement brews over the amazing slope that awaits.

Photo: Jeremy Black/MINT TOURS
Location: MINOWA

KEI

Worked for Hoshino Resorts Alts Bandai/ Nekoma Ski Resort for 12 years from 2005 with a focus in marketing. Moved onto Sherpa Co., Ltd. as of May 2017 where he currently works as a consultant in the field of snow and surfing. He spends half of his year either snowboard or surfing. ■

Web: zao-spa.or.jp/english/index.html

Powder snow brings its own tribulations. Sweat covers the body while trudging through waist-deep snow. Visibility is impeded by fogged-up goggles. Yet, all of this is forgotten knowing the joy that awaits beyond the trek.

Photo: Jeremy Black/MINT TOURS
Location: ALTS



Sharp eyes on the prize with soft snow down below. Nothing compares to the sheer elation of carving out an amazing turn.

Photo: Teemu Heljo/MINT TOURS
Location: NEKOMA

Urabandai Grandeco Tokyu Hotel



A luxury hotel adjacent to the Grandeco Snow Resort. Guestroom makeovers completed in November 2019 to create a peaceful atmosphere. Restaurant selections include the ever-popular teppanyaki, Japanese cuisine, and French cuisine. Enjoy your hotel stay with an active day out before settling in at night for a delectable feast.

<http://www.grandeco.com>

Welcome to the Snow Heaven
AIZU·BANDAI
Recommendations for the best hotels in the area.

Hoshino Resorts Bandaisan Onsen Hotel



Hoshino Resorts Bandaisan Onsen Hotel is connected to the Hoshino Resorts Aizu Bandai ski resort directly which is one of the largest ski resorts of northeast Japan with 29 courses and famous for its new parks.

www.bandaisan.co.jp/en/



Active Resorts Urabandai

A hot spring resort hotel where you can soak up the great outdoors of the Bandai Asahi National Park. Enjoy the snowy hot-spring scenery from the open-air outdoor bath built with stones from the Mount Bandai eruption.

<https://www.daiwaresort.jp/urabandai>



Numajiri Kogen Lodge

The first woman to successfully reach the summit of Mount Everest, the late Junko Tabei. She was the former owner of the Numajiri Kogen Lodge, a place loved by many.

Web: <https://www.numajiri-lodge.com/>



There is Lake Hibara behind our lobby. This is the only place in Japan that you can see the lobby with its luxurious chandeliers and lavishly used marble.

<http://www.lakeresort.jp>

Urabandai Lake Resort





NEWS



Take a Quick
80-minute
Trip on the
Shinkansen from
Tokyo to a Snow
Wonderland

A journey to discover
new marvels of Echigo Yuzawa

Words and photography: Kazuya Baba

“Upon leaving the long tunnel on the prefectural border there was a country of snow.”

Snow Country, by Nobel Prize winning author, Yasunari Kawabata, begins with this famous line. This article will introduce you to the land of snow featured in this very book—Echigo Yuzawa. There is a long tunnel connecting Tokyo to this region and, as described in the above quote, emerging from this tunnel will greet you with an other-worldly view of snow as far as the eye can see.

One of the reasons why the scenery appears to seemingly change in an instant can be put down to the area’s closeness to the city. The short distance juxtaposed with the starkly different surrounds leads to this experience. The advance of technology has also possibly helped to aid this sensation. Echigo Yuzawa is one of Japan’s most prominent areas of abundant snow, yet it can now be reached in a short 1 hour and 20 minutes via *shinkansen* (bullet train) from Tokyo, the gateway to Japan. I have visited this location many times to write about it for *jSnow*, however, this time I will use the slew of information I have gathered to introduce some ski resorts, aspects of culture, and new activities that have not yet been covered to date.

I have been fortunate enough to be offered generous opportunities in order to spread the word about the area’s wonders to Australian

I highly recommend a stay at Sudo House if you want to experience local life in the area during your stay in Gala Yuzawa.

snow fans across the country. As such, I’d like to preface this article with my intention to include promotional information about the accommodation and other services I have been provided, at no cost, in order to show my gratitude for their kindness.

A SKI RESORT CONNECTED DIRECTLY TO A *SHINKANSEN* STATION

There are many ski resorts in the surrounds of Echigo Yuzawa, however, the most convenient of them all would have to be the only resort in the world that has its own station connected to the *shinkansen* line—Gala Yuzawa Snow Resort. Articles focusing on Gala often spruik the convenience of being able to take daytrips here without any gear on hand due to the ability to rent everything you’d need right from the facilities connected to the station. As for me, I think it’s important to focus on the fact that it has been recently linked to Yuzawa Kogen Ski Resort and Ishiuchimaruyama Ski Area, and acts as the gateway to this massive interconnected area featuring a total of 48 courses for guests to shred up.

Purchasing a combined lift pass allows you access across the three areas, making for seamless travel back and forth between them, but the sheer size of the areas is almost overwhelming. Many visitors take daytrips directly on the *shinkansen* to visit Gala on its own, however, attempting to conquer all three mountains in one day is simply impossible. If you have your eye on taking on all the courses on offer, pencil yourself in for an extended trip.

On my trip this time around, I was given the opportunity to set up base at Sudo House (<https://www.facebook.com/Sudo-House-Yuzawa-Japan-474419406396406/>), an Airbnb located two-minutes away from the base of Gala Yuzawa Snow Resort and owned by an Australian. The owner of Sudo House absolutely loves Yuzawa and she provides traveller accommodation in a typical Japanese home for visitors to experience residential life in a snow region of Japan. I highly recommend a stay at

Sudo House if you want to experience local life in the area during your stay in Gala Yuzawa. Nearby is Takahan, which is famous for being the Japanese inn Yasunari Kawabata stayed in as he wrote *Snow Country*. Following the establishment’s upgrade into a hotel, the famous author’s room has been preserved separately. The hotel also offers hot springs drawn directly from the source and other *onsen* baths for guests to drop by on a daytrip, enjoy a relaxing soak in the hot springs and experience the passion that drove Kawabata to write his novel.

A STATE-OF-THE-ART COMBO SKI LIFT

In this issue of *jSnow*, I’d like to shift my spotlight over to Ishiuchimaruyama Ski Area. This resort, steeped in history, began operations in 1949 and boasts the biggest ski slope in the region. Its long history means it avoids national forest logging restrictions and is absolutely massive. The beautiful, expansive slope can be gazed upon from the mountain’s peak, and it has a unique layout to cater to skiers and snowboarders of all levels. Ishiuchimaruyama saw a complete overhaul over the 2019 season. A new base station was set up at the base of the mountain for ticket sales and other services, as well as a stand where you can drop by and taste various different *sake* (Japanese rice wine).

This overhaul also saw the debut of the Sunrise Express—a state-of-the-art combo ski lift which connects the middle of the course directly to the base. The hybrid ski lift operates ten-person gondola cabins and six-person chair lifts on a single line. The gondolas are fitted with luxurious leather seats and windows all around the entire carriage, and the lifts have seat heaters built into them. These lifts allow even beginners to travel up to the middle of the slope in comfort and with peace of mind.

Ishiuchimaruyama has a history of farmers running restaurants on the slope where they serve meals using home-grown vegetables and rice. This custom has led to a number of privately-run restaurants operating on the



NIIGATA ECHIGO YUZAWA



slope; all of them providing top-quality food. The vastly improved access to these areas on the slopes is sure to bring a smile to faces of everyone dropping by to visit the restaurants.

CHOOSING TO STAY AT THE BASE OF ISHIUCHIMARUYAMA

The most obvious choice when choosing a place to stay in the Yuzawa area would be to find a spot in the hot-spring town surrounds of Echigo Yuzawa where a variety of accommodation establishments, restaurants, and shops can be found. However, with the recent introduction of night-time operating hours for snow-enthusiasts to shred the courses of Ishiuchimaruyama after dark, the amount of accommodation establishments has increased around the area. There was originally a healthy selection of places to stay in the area, but the number of Airbnb locations and other such facilities has increased substantially to meet the growing demands of skiers and snowboarders from overseas. A particularly popular establishment is Ishimaru House (<http://ishimaruhouse.com/>), a two-storey, detached house available for rental. This house features four bedrooms allowing up to ten guests to stay, and is a quick three-minute walk from the ski area. It is also conveniently located close to restaurants and a supermarket as well. This very clean and comfortable home is also rather cost-effective, especially when staying at capacity, coming in at just over 30,000 yen per night for the entire house.

If you happen to be a fan of Japanese cuisine, you'll be happy to hear that you can also cook and enjoy rice grown by the family of the person who owns the house. This area is known to produce some of the best rice in Japan, and the proof is in the rice itself. The rice is fluffy, chewy, and definitely deserves to be tasted.

I would also recommend a stay at the newly-built Yuki no Shizuku (<http://yukino-shizuku.jp/>), which can be found at the base of Ishiuchimaruyama Ski Area in the ski-in, ski-out location. The modern-Japanese concept

of this hotel perfectly combines the nostalgic air of Japan with a refined, modern atmosphere and places heavy focus on privacy with only ten spacious rooms on the premises. Breakfast and dinners here are also a treat to feast on all the local produce lovingly cooked into delicious meals. Head on over to experience it yourself when you're in the area.

ENDLESS FUN TO BE HAD AROUND THE SKI SLOPES

I have covered Naeba Kagura many times in *jSnow* as a popular area when staying in Yuzawa. It's a popular location to enjoy the vast sidecountry trails, however, it's also fairly well-known amongst many international hardcore skiers and snowboarders. This is why I will be taking this opportunity to focus on independent ski resorts and fun activities in the area that I have not introduced to devout readers of *jSnow* before.

First up is Maiko Snow Resort. This snow resort can be reached via a free shuttle bus ride from Echigo-Yuzawa station or a one-minute drive from the Shiozawa Ishiuchi IC exit on the motorway. The ease of access makes it a family ski resort that sees many visitors from Tokyo drop by on daytrips.

The term "family ski resort" might lead hardcore skiers and snowboarders to believe that it lacks any real challenge, but that's not the case. Non-compacted snow areas and tree-run courses can be accessed from the top of the slope, offering top-class powder snow for those who seek it out. International skiers and snowboarders are yet to discover the soaring potential of this ski resort, making it a hidden gem just waiting to be uncovered.

One of the reasons this ski resort is touted as being "family-friendly" stems from its comprehensive school for children. Programs at this ski school are created for children with the concept of "Snow Education" or playing and learning in the snow, under the supervision of former Japanese ski demonstrator, Miki Nakazawa. There is





also a child care centre for parents to hit the slopes with peace of mind knowing that their children are enjoying themselves under the watchful eye of professionals.

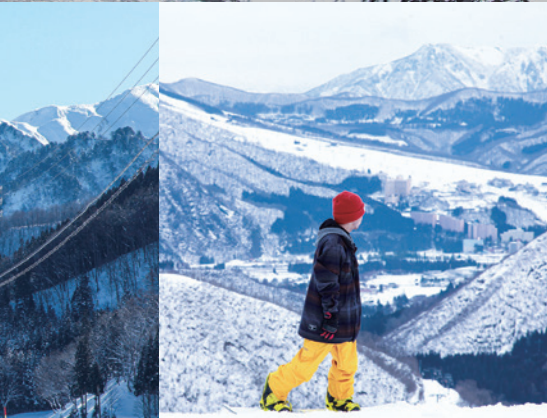
A quick three-minute drive from Yuzawa IC, or a seven-minute trip by shuttle bus from Echigo-Yuzawa station is another conveniently located ski area—Kandatsu Snow Resort. The resort underwent a name-change together with a rebranding, and the renovation of the building at the base of the slope over the 2020 season. This change saw the establishment of a café, a state-of-the-art rental shop, and a complete overhaul of its interior to create a more refined, urban atmosphere. A happy attraction at this establishment is its hot spring facilities. There are also newly-created courses and tree-run trails, as well as an expansion to the snow park. Kandatsu Snow Resort is a new area that is sure to garner attention.

A VARIETY OF SNOW ACTIVITIES

Yuzawa is a prominent region in Japan where snow is essentially a way of life. An area full of snow naturally brings with it a range of snow activities outside of skiing and snowboarding. These activities form part of the culture of snowy regions and experiencing them is part of the fun of visiting Yuzawa.

A stay at NASPA Ski Garden (<http://naspanewotani.com/>), a Western-styled luxury hotel with ski-in, ski-out facilities offering a private ski-slope experience, will give you the opportunity to join in on a night buggy tour. Take a thrilling ride to the top of the mountain with up to four other people on this new-to-Japan snow buggy and see the beautiful nighttime views with this popular activity. Head over to the hotel's official website or contact NASPA New Otani directly for more information.

Snow Country Tourism (<http://snow-country-tourism.jp>), a tourism association set up to promote the snow culture in this area, also offers a variety of events and activities. Snowshoe tours in the great outdoors are one of the many fun experiences available.





Thirty-minutes away from Echigo Yuzawa is the nature-rich snowy mountain of the Daigenta area. Enjoy a relaxed snowshoe-walk through the snowfield with an experienced guide leading the way. During the tour, the guide will offer insight on and show you sights only found on snowy mountains of Japan, such as “*yukimaroge*”, which are balls of snow formed by rolling down the mountain, and “*kumadana*” or “bear shelves” found atop trees. Be sure to check out one of these tours during your downtime on a sunny day.

DEEP THOUGHTS ON SNOW-COUNTRY CULTURE

Approximately ten minutes by car from the Ishiuchi Interchange, or 25 minutes from Echigo-Yuzawa station is Ueda no Sato (<http://uedanosato.com/pg428.html>), located in the heart of where the best rice in Japan is grown and where Uonuma Koshihikari rice is produced. Ueda no Sato is a facility where you can experience the rural culture to be found in Uonuma.

Drop by the restaurant here to feast on the rural cuisine made using delicious local vegetables and rice, or try your hand at making *soba* noodles. You can also have a “*kamakura*” experience where you eat and spend time in

Yuzawa has been long-known as a tourist destination filled with visitors enjoying the hot springs.

a hut built out of snow. *Kamakura* is an old Japanese New Year’s custom in snowy regions where altars are placed inside of huts made of snow. These huts are lit up and are offered to the gods. The term “*kamakura*” refers to the actual snow structures themselves. If you’re after some quintessential experiences found only in snowy regions of Japan, step out of your snow resort and drop by a facility like Ueda no Sato.

Sake continues to gain popularity in Australia, and Niigata just happens to be a prominent producer of the alcoholic beverage and is the home of the famous brand—Hakkaisan. The Hakkaisan Brewery not only produces *sake*, but also runs Uonuma no Sato.

This establishment was created to allow visitors to experience the “warmth and nostalgia of the snow country” through the lifestyle and cultural experiences to be had there. Cafés, restaurants, dessert shops, and other places to soothe the mind can be found within the grounds of this facility.

You can also have a look at the natural snow refrigeration room. These are commonplace amongst those who live in these snowy areas. Snow rooms are natural refrigerators made of snow and a variety of *sake* is stored in the one here. *Sake* is left to age for up to five years in the storehouse made by gathering 1,000 tonnes of snow. This ageing process is said to produce a smoother flavour. On your tour of the snow room, you can also sample and purchase some *sake* or *mirin* produced by the brewer. While Uonuma no Sato is located a station beyond Echigo Yuzawa on the *shinkansen*, the extra trip is well worth it to learn all about the interesting snow country culture here.

Niigata prefecture is well-known as a Japanese wonderland of snow, and Yuzawa has been long-known as a tourist destination filled with visitors enjoying the hot springs. On your next trip here, pack away your skis for a while and turn your attention to the fascinating snow culture fostered here over the centuries to uncover a new side of Japan. ■



A traditional, quintessential ski-slope in Yuzawa, one of the country's best snow grounds Experience amazing views and the snow-capped mountain on a state-of-the-art gondola!

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CLOSING PHOTO GALLERY

Exploring a new destination steeped in history – GIFU

Photography: Kazuya Baba



The view from Meiho Ski Resort, just 30-minutes away from Gujo Hachiman.

We here are *jSnow* introduce our readers to new snow destinations in every issue we publish. This time around, we'll be shining a light on a place largely unfamiliar to our fan base—Gifu. Readers will most likely associate regions we have covered, such as Hokkaido, Nagano, and Niigata, as renowned snow destinations in Japan. However, residents of Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, and other areas of western Japan are likely to have deep connections with Gifu when it comes to snow. Gifu is situated next to Nagano prefecture in a deep inland mountainous area. While its location makes for excellent snow, it remains fairly unknown to international visitors due to the lack of outward marketing as the place to go for snow. This makes it a hidden gem just waiting to be uncovered.

I will be telling you all about the wonders of Gifu through this closing feature alongside the collection of photos I took on my visit there during the 2020 season. The photos were taken while I was based in three locations: Gujo Hachiman, which is a mere stone's throw away from Nagoya (the third largest city in Japan after Tokyo and Osaka); Hida Takayama, which is a popular tourist destination where old townscapes of Japan can be seen; and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Shirakawa-go.

A waterside town
at the base of a
mountain
Home of the
famous Gujo Odori

GUJO HACHIMAN

Gujo Hachiman Castle
looks beautiful in snowy
winters as well.



A historical Japanese
townscape filled with old
and wonderful charms.





Stunning water channels are found all over the place. Koi can also be spotted swimming in them.



GUJO MACHIMAN



A view of the whole town can be seen from the castle.

Gujo is a riverside town known for its pure and beautiful water.





The retro-feel of the red-roofed *izakaya* (Japanese pub) wonderfully oozes with history.

Trying your hand at making food samples is another joy of visiting Gujo. Tempura prawns, lettuce, and other food samples can be made here.



Gujo is known for its Gujo Odori, a much-loved dance with over 400 years of history. The custom of dancing on end throughout the town can be seen from July to September.



There is a project underway in Gujo where traditional Japanese dolls, displayed during the Girls' Festival, known as "*hina ningyo*" are "brought to life". These dolls can be found around town getting up to all sorts of activities.

Gifu is the home of Hida Beef (*Hida-gyu*), a famous brand of wagyu.

Kobokobo—local beer brewed using the town's pristine water.



Meiho Ski Resort is a famous Gifu ski slope. Its many snow machines guarantee plentiful snow at all times.

GUJO NACMIMAN

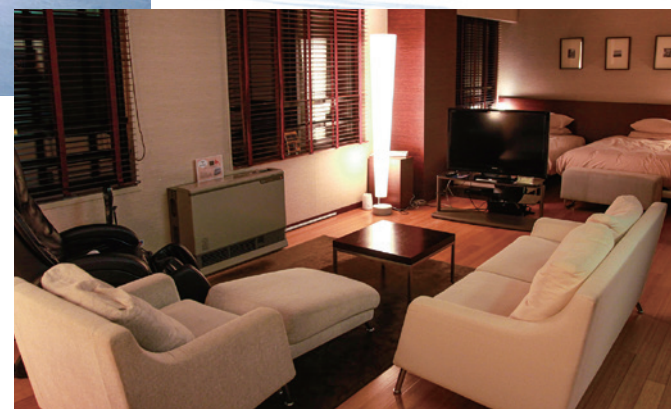
Takasu-Dynaland Ski Resort is the largest ski resort in western Japan and boasts a colorful station on its slope.



Powder snow can be enjoyed on the tree-runs here following a night of snowfall.



Ryu Resort and Spa (http://ryuresort.jp/lg_en/) is a luxury resort partway between the Gujo area and Takayama. Drop on by if you're looking for a plush stay in Gifu.





Takayama Jinya is the only surviving government headquarters from the Edo period. Head over in the morning to stroll through the markets held at the plaza in front of the gate there every day.



Endless hours can be spent simply strolling around the old streets and visiting the shops here.

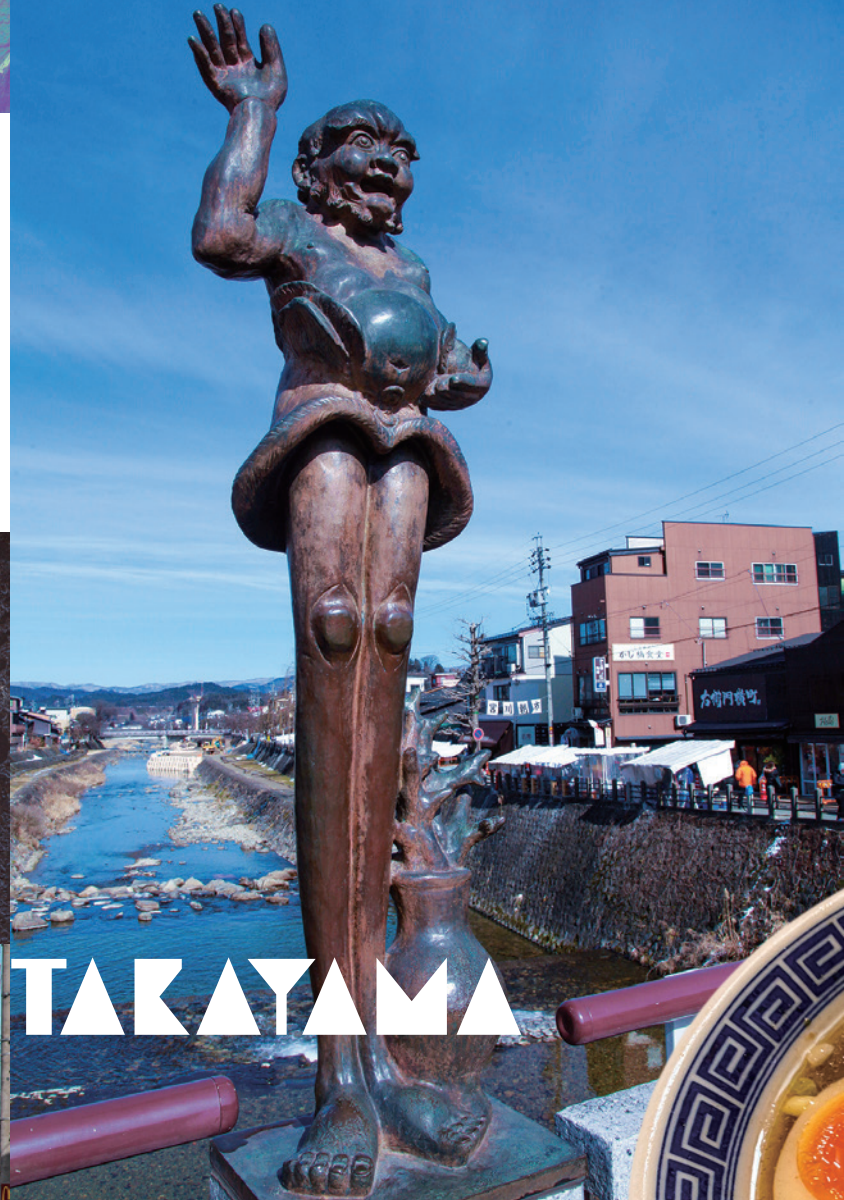


MIDA TAKAYAMA



Streets filled with Edo-period history and culture; mountains bursting with snow activities

One of the big three morning markets in Japan—Miyagawa Morning Market. Well worth rising early for a visit.



MIDA TAKAYAMA



In the centre of Takayama city are two bronze statues: Tenaga (long arms) and Ashinaga (long legs). This one here is Ashinaga. The statues are of characters in Japanese folk tales.

Takayama is also famous for its ramen and "Takayama-style" ramen is known across Japan. This particular ramen is from Mametengu, a long-established popular ramen restaurant. This is a must-visit restaurant for ramen lovers.



Honokidaira Ski Resort is located approximately 40-minutes away from Takayama. This undiscovered gem offers the best powder snow experience in all of Gifu owing to its high altitude.



For those looking to enjoy some sightseeing or activities in Hida Takayama, drop by to visit Satoyama Experience (<http://satoyama-experience.com/>), a service well-trusted by overseas visitors. This picture was taken during a snowshoe tour.



The night-view of Shirakawa-go from the observation deck.

SHIRAKAWA-GO

Scarecrows, modelled on humans, have been used since ancient times to keep birds away from farms and fields.

Thatched-roof houses: a typical building technique in snowy regions
Beautiful winter wonderlands in this World Heritage Site



The sight of thatched-roof houses is quintessential to snowy rural areas of Japan. This area is now popular amongst visitors from overseas following its inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



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