

Visitor Guide to Shinanomachi Nagano, Japan

English
www.shinanomachi-nagano.jp

Experience more: Explore the wonderful natural environment of Shinanomachi



長野県信濃町

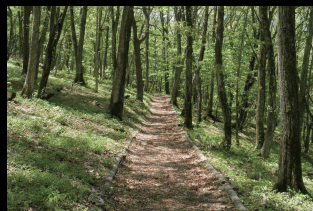


The Iyashi no Mori Healing Forest



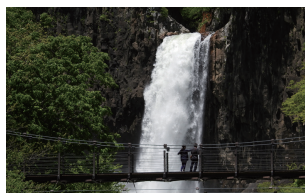
Relax naturally: Take a walk in the woods at Iyashi no Mori

Shinanomachi was the first town in Japan to conduct medical research on the mental and physical healing effects of forest environments, and is widely known as a leader in forest therapy. Conducted in partnership with doctors and universities, this research confirmed that forest therapy has a number of medical benefits such as lowering blood pressure, reducing stress hormones, and increasing immune activity. The healing power of the forest can bring back "time lost" to today's stress-filled society. Welcome to Iyashi no Mori Healing Forest, Japan's highlands resort!



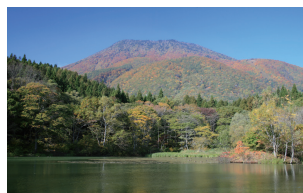
Hiking trail

3 Courses
for Enjoying Iyashi no
Mori Healing Forest



Naena Taki (Naena Falls) Course
This longer walking course leads from the Kurohime Highlands to Naena Falls, one of Japan's 100 most scenic waterfalls, and offers the ultimate in therapeutic "forest bathing."

Distance: About 7 km
Time: About 4.5 hours
Location: Kurohime Kogen—Myoko Kogen



Ojika Ike (Ojika Pond) Course
Perfect for beginners, this course loops through the forests and fields surrounding Ojika Pond, an environment filled with the sounds of babbling streams and twittering birds.

Distance: About 1.2 km
Time: About 1.5 hours
Location: Kurohime Kogen



Zo no Komichi (Elephant's Path) Course

This relatively easy walking course near the shores of Lake Nojiri, where Naumann elephant fossils have been excavated, offers therapeutic "forest bathing" with lake views and breezes.

Distance: About 2.5 km
Time: About 2 hours
Location: Lake Nojiri

With Abundant Forests and Gentle People Shinanomachi Has "Healing Power"

C.W. Nicol

Writer. Born in South Wales, UK, in 1940. After serving in various environmental and conservation positions around the world, including technician at the Fisheries Research Board of Canada Arctic Biological Station, Environmental Emergency Officer at the Environmental Protection Service of Canada, and game warden at the Semien Mountains National Park in Ethiopia, Nicol has lived in Shinanomachi since 1980. Beginning in 1986 he started acquiring neglected woodlands and working to regenerate them through his Afan Woodland Trust. In 2005, in recognition of these activities, he was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) by Queen Elizabeth II. In 2016 he received the 26th Midori no Bunka (Green Culture) Prize from the National Land Afforestation Promotion Organization. Also in 2016, the Emperor and Empress of Japan visited the Afan Woodland Trust.

Interview C. W. Nicol

Writer, Environmentalist

Originally from the United Kingdom, C.W. Nicol is a prominent writer and environmentalist in Japan. After being involved in environmental conservation activities around the world, he settled in Shinanomachi in 1980. Currently, he is engaged in forest regeneration at the Afan Woodlands in Kurohime Kogen. We asked him to share his thoughts on the appeal of Shinanomachi and its natural environment that he knows so well.

What Drew Me to Shinanomachi and Kept Me Here

A long time ago I conducted research and exploration in the Arctic and in Ethiopia and many other regions. I saw many parts of the world but found myself particularly drawn to the natural beauty of Japan and decided I wanted to live here. At the time I would have been happy to live in any rural part of the country. After a while a friend invited me to Shinanomachi. I spent a year living in an old house with a thatched roof and found the people very friendly and the town very comfortable. That's when I began thinking it would be a good place to settle.

The town has much to recommend it. The air is good. The water is clean. The food—mountain greens, mushrooms, vegetables, freshwater fish—is delicious. With Tokyo not far away, the location is ideal. This is where I've been able to pursue my dreams. I couldn't have done so in the city. Everyone who visits from overseas remarks on how wonderful the nature and people are here in Shinanomachi.

The Healing Effect of Shinanomachi's Forests

Abundant forests in which flora and fauna coexist have been scientifically proven to have a healing effect. Such abundant

forests can be found here in Shinanomachi. In cooperation with medical institutions, we tested visitors' blood and blood pressure before and after walking in the forest, and everyone exhibited lower blood pressure and higher immunity in the "after" testing. We had children draw pictures after walking in the woods and you could see the effect it had on their drawings and gestures. I think woodlands are the future of Shinanomachi—quiet, free of unpleasant smells, and easy on the eyes. The sounds of the forest—the babbling of little streams, the twittering of songbirds, the calls of frogs and insects—speak gently to people. Half of our DNA is from the sea, but the other half is from the forest. Woodlands are where our hearts belong. We have two horses now living at the Afan Woodlands Trust that are engaged in horse logging, a traditional, eco-friendly way of hauling timber. In the future we hope to also use horses for equine therapy and for mountain safaris.

Favorite Scenery and Spots in Shinanomachi

My favorite place, of course, is the Afan Woodland Trust, but the view of Mt. Kurohime from the Kurohime Fairy Tale Museum is also lovely—very much like the scenery in Europe. I think it would be nice

if sheep were kept there to eat the weeds, and even better if there were horses, too. I also very much like the view looking down on Lake Nojiri and its surroundings from the upper part of Mt. Madarao

A Note to Readers

Japanese people, and particularly those in Shinanomachi and other rural areas, are kind and always willing to help someone in trouble. If you need anything, don't be afraid to ask! Shinanomachi has good forests, many places where you can camp, and inns that are accustomed to guests from overseas. If you've come all the way to Japan, you should definitely jump in and experience the wonderful natural environment of Shinanomachi.



The view from the Kurohime Fairy Tale Museum

Afan Woodland Trust



From Regenerating the Forest to Reviving the Mind and Revitalizing the Community

Japan was covered in abundant forests since ancient times and its people lived in harmony with a beautiful natural environment. Swept aside by the waves of rapid economic growth, however, more and more forests were devastated. Writer C.W. Nicol began working to regenerate the forests of Kurohime in 1986 in the hope of bringing back Japan's beautiful natural environment and a love of nature in people's hearts. Thanks to its many supporters, the ecosystem of the Afan Woodlands is coming back to life year by year and many regionally endangered animals and plants have returned. Using horses to haul felled timber and plow fields, the trust seeks to enable people to live fully in an environment that is naturally suited to Japan.

(The Afan Woodlands still cover a relatively small area. The environment is easily altered by the presence of people, so access is prohibited as a rule.)





Lake Nojiri



Slow time: Glide on the waters of a mysterious mountain lake

Formed when volcanic debris from Mt. Kurohime created a dam, Lake Nojiri is designated a special area within the Myoko-Togakushi Renzan National Park and still offers outstanding lake scenery. Lake Nojiri is also well known as a summer retreat for residents of Japan from overseas, a tradition that began in 1922 when missionary Daniel Norman left Karuizawa, which he felt had become too famous, in search of a climate similar to his native Canada. Learning of refreshing Lake Nojiri and its mountainous, forested surroundings, he established a retreat for foreign residents in the Kamiyama area along the lake's southwest shores. Because local residents have always prioritized conservation, Lake Nojiri avoided the over-development of Japan's "leisure boom" years and remains a beautiful spot. Uga Shrine, founded in 730, stands on Biwa Island (also known as Benten Island). The shrine's current main sanctuary was built in 1655. The island and shrine can be reached by pleasure cruiser, canoe, or rowboat, and many people come from far away to pray.







Miles Peterson

An American born in 1991, Peterson was born and raised in Japan. After attending an international school in Japan, he majored in marine biology at a college in Colorado in the United States. After graduation he moved to Shinanomachi, which he had visited every year as a child. Now part of the team at Dancing Snow Myoko Outdoor Adventures, he works as a nature guide throughout the region including in Kurohime Kogen, Madarao Kogen, and Myoko Kogen.

Interview Miles Peterson

Nature Guide
(Climbing, Skiing, Kayaking)

An American born and raised in Japan, Peterson went to college in the United States but then moved to Shinanomachi, where he had spent time in his youth. Today he works as a nature guide, sharing the outdoors that he loves with all sorts of people. We asked him for his thoughts on how to enjoy Shinanomachi.

Shinanomachi: The Simple Charm of an Earlier Time in Japan

How I Came to Shinanomachi

I was born and raised in Japan. My parents had a cabin at the International Village on Lake Nojiri so we came to Shinanomachi every summer and winter. I first moved to the town four years ago after graduating from college in the United States. I majored in marine biology there and now help out at the Nagano prefectural research center while working as a nature guide. As a child I learned to ski in Kurohime Kogen and fished Lake Nojiri in the summer.

Working in Shinanomachi

During summers I work as a climbing guide and teach canoeing and kayaking. In the winter I work as a backcountry ski and snowshoe guide in Kurohime Kogen, Madarao Kogen, and Myoko Kogen. There are a lot of visitors from overseas in the winter but in the summer it's about a half-and-half split between domestic and overseas. These activities are all things I've enjoyed doing since I was a boy, and then in college I trained and got certified as a

guide. I also like to pick wild greens and often take visitors into the mountains to do so. Shinanomachi still has beautiful rural scenery and draws a lot of visitors from overseas who want to enjoy a sense of the real Japan.

Favorite Scenery and Spots in Shinanomachi

I like to climb Mt. Madarao from the Sugakawa area; the view of Mt. Kurohime and Lake Nojiri from the peak is fantastic, especially in the evening as the sun falls behind the mountain. When I go out kayaking in the morning on Lake Nojiri, the way the rising sun reddens the mountains is also very beautiful. In the winter the morning sun brings a hint of pink to the snow in the mountains. I often go to Naena Falls between Shinanomachi and Myoko, too. The foliage there in the autumn is fantastic and brilliantly colored.

A Note to Readers

I became a nature guide because I really love the outdoors and wanted to share it with all sorts of people. Shinanomachi really has an amazing natural environment. A lot of old-fashioned rural Japanese scenery can still be found, too, like old houses and shrines and temples. The location is good, too. There are mountains to climb, the ocean is easy to get to, the city of Nagano is close by—you can get anywhere pretty easily. Shinanomachi is right at the center of it all, and I hope you'll come and enjoy the town's simple pleasures!



Miles shares the wonders of Shinanomachi's natural environment with people all year round.



Lake Nojiri Floating Lanterns and Fireworks Festival

This fireworks festival has been an annual summer tradition in Shinanomachi since the 1920s. Taking up a different theme each year, the fireworks display packs a special punch when exploding over the water's surface due to the unique acoustic characteristics of the lake. Illuminated floating lanterns released on the lake add a magical and distinctively Japanese touch.

Museum

Lake Nojiri Naumann Elephant Museum
(Nojiri-ko Museum)



Located on the shores of Lake Nojiri, the museum conducts research and presents exhibits related to the surrounding area's natural environment and history stretching from 50,000 years ago through to the present day. It focuses on archeological excavations that began in 1962 and have continued for more than 50 years. Highlights include life-sized models of Naumann's elephants and Yabe's elk based on excavated fossils and an area where visitors can handle real fossils.

Hours: 09:00–17:00 (09:00–16:00 from 1 Dec–19 Mar)
Closed: Last day of May, June, Sept, and Oct (if a Sunday or holiday, closed the next day)
Admission: Age 16+ ¥500 / Age 6–15 ¥300



Kurohime Kogen

Breathe deep: Wander among beautiful flowers and scenery with a European touch

Part of a national park, Mr. Kurohime is sometimes called the Mt. Fuji of the Shinano region because of its conical shape. The Kurohime Kogen highlands spread out at the mountain's eastern foot. Local ski resorts offer 100% natural powder snow in the winter while summer brings beautiful cosmos flowers and autumn colorful foliage. There are many small hotels, pensions, and rental cottages in the area where you can stay and relax in whatever style suits you, whether you prefer the cool, refreshing summers or the magical snowy winters.



Mountain Climbing

Mt. Kurohime has a number of maintained climbing trails, the most popular of which starts at the Ohashi trailhead. After passing through forests of massive beech trees, the path leads to expansive highlands marshland around 80% the way up the Nishi trail, to Nanatsuike Pond, and then to outstanding views from the summit. On a clear day you can see the mountains of the Northern Alps, Shiga Kogen, and even Mt. Fuji.



Museum

Kurohime Fairy Tale Museum

Kurohime Kogen has a long involvement with writers of picture books and fairy tales, and many children's stories were even created here. The Kurohime Fairy Tale Museum exhibits a wide-ranging collection centered on the works of German writer Michael Ende, author of *Momo* and *The Neverending Story*. It also has fairy tale and picture books from around the world, as well as the folk tales of Nagano prefecture. The museum's beautiful natural setting amid the forests and meadows of Kurohime is itself like something from a fairy tale.

Hours: 09:00-17:00

Open: 5 April-30 November

Closed: Last day of May, June, Sept, and Oct (if a Sunday or holiday, closed the next day)

Admission: Age 16+ ¥600 / Age 6-15 ¥400

Madarao Kogen

Expand horizons: Enjoy the ever-changing colors and vistas of the four seasons

Madarao Kogen is a highlands resort area at the foot of Mt. Madarao. Located at an elevation of about 1,000 meters, the area offers a wide range of outdoor activities from spring through fall such as hiking, ziplining, and walking through expansive fields of lilies. In the winter, Tangram Ski Circus and Madarao Kogen Ski Resort are popular destinations for abundant powder snow.



Photo Credit : Nagano Tourism Organization



Hiking

Among the many maintained trails for day hiking, one of the best is the Lake Nojiri View Trail leading from Hotel Tangram to the peak of Mt. Madarao. Along the way, the Lake Nojiri Terrace is a great spot to take in the outstanding views of Lake Nojiri below, the other four mountains that make up the Hokushin Five Peaks, and the Northern Alps in the distance. The summit of Mt. Madarao also marks the starting point for the 80-kilometer long Shin'etsu Trail.



Resort

Madarao Tokyu Resort

At the heart of the Madarao Kogen area, the resort includes facilities such as hotels, restaurants, banquet rooms, and hot springs, and also functions as a ski lodge and golf clubhouse.

Hot Spring Characteristics: Simple hot spring (low alkalinity, low tonicity, high temperature)

Effective in Treating: Neuralgia, muscle pain, sore joints, stiff shoulders, chills, bruises, fatigue



Winter Activities

Jump in: Ski the deepest powder snow in Nagano





Kurohime Kogen Snow Park

Located at the base of Mt. Kurohime, Kurohime Kogen Snow Park offers a balanced variety of beginner, intermediate, and advanced trails to ensure a good time for people of all skill levels. The eleven trails offer incredible views and varied terrain from top to bottom. Particularly well suited for families, the park even includes a kids-only area. Other activities include a snowmobile course, a winter Strider course, sledding, and playing in the snow.

<http://www.kurohime-kogen.co.jp/>

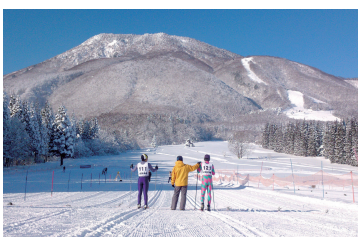


Tangram Ski Circus

With dynamic runs that take advantage of the natural terrain, Tangram Ski Circus is connected to the adjacent Madarao Kogen Ski Resort. Purchase of a Mountain Pass gives you access to all 30 trails extending across both areas. There is a well-equipped kids park, a terrain park, and terrific snow activities like snowmobiling and snow rafting. From family-oriented trails to powder runs through the trees that follow the natural wooded terrain, there is something for every skill level from beginner to advanced.

A shuttle bus is available that connects Tangram Ski Circus with the nearby Myoko Akakura ski area. When staying in Shinanomachi, you can enjoy skiing and snowboarding across a broad area including Kurohime, Madarao, and Myoko.

<http://www.tangram.jp/eng/>



Cross-country Skiing

Kurohime Kogen is home to one of the best cross-country ski courses in the country. Called Dowa no Mori Snow Wave (Fairy Tale Forest Snow Wave), it commands spectacular views of Mt. Kurohime and Mt. Myoko. Rental equipment and changing rooms are available, making it easy for anyone to join in.



Snowshoeing

Snowshoeing is a terrific way to experience the woods in winter. You can follow animal tracks through an extraordinary all-white world while walking through forests filled with huge trees that are only accessible in winter. We recommend joining a tour led by an experienced guide who knows the terrain and where to find the best views.



Pond Smelt Fishing

During the winter, you can try fishing for pond smelt from a covered boat on Lake Nojiri. The interior of the boat is heated and warm, and you can bring boxed lunches, coffee, and drinks on board with you.



Summer Activities

Get active: Play in the refreshing green outdoors of the summer highlands



Water Activities

You can enjoy all sorts of water activities on Lake Nojiri including canoeing, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding (SUP), waterskiing, and wakeboarding. Instructors are available to provide both guidance and life preservers, so even beginners can enjoy the water safely. Explore scenic spots only reachable from the water or visit Benten Island by pleasure cruiser to pray at the mysterious Uga Shrine, which was founded in 730. Enjoy the refreshing experience of cutting through the wind while moving across the surface of the lake.

Camping and Barbeque

Shinanomachi has a number of campsites, both along the shores of the lake and in places offering panoramic views of Mt. Kurohime and Mt. Myoko. Prices vary, but you can choose from tent sites, auto sites, and bungalows depending on the style you prefer. There's nothing better than enjoying the cool breezes of Shinanomachi with a barbecue during the day and then going to sleep under a star-filled sky at night—something you can't experience in Tokyo or Kyoto!



Why not rent a bicycle for a ride through Shinanomachi's natural environment?



You can go all the way around Lake Nojiri, follow the Naena Falls course, or—if you're feeling especially energetic—head to the Togakushi Shrine "power spot." There are also longer courses such as the Shin'etsu Five Highlands Route. It feels really refreshing to cycle in the cool highlands breeze. Rental bicycles are available at the tourist information center in Kurohime Station and at many local accommodation facilities. Some hotels have mountain bikes available, too. A variety of trails are available to suit every skill level from beginners to advanced riders.



Seegan Mabesoone

Born in France in 1968, his real name is Laurent Mabesoone. He first encountered haiku while studying in Japan during high school, then studied Issa at the University of Paris in France before returning to Japan and earning his PhD at Waseda University. Over the ensuing 20 years and more he has lived in the northern Nagano area as a haiku poet, Issa scholar, and university lecturer. During the Olympic Winter Games in Nagano in 1998, while working as a Coordinator for International Relations at the prefectural office, he proposed and ran a cultural program to welcome visitors called "One Haiku for the Olympics."

Interview Seegan Mabesoone

Haiku Poet, Issa Scholar,
University Lecturer

Born in France. First encountered haiku while studying in Japan. Has lived in Nagano prefecture for more than 20 years as a haiku poet, Issa scholar, and university lecturer. We asked him to talk about what makes haiku and Kobayashi Issa so appealing.

Shinanomachi: A Land of Nature and Culture Where Issa Was Born

My Encounter With Issa

I loved poetry when I was a boy and wanted to be a poet when I grew up. At the age of 16 I came to Japan for the first time as an exchange student while in high school. In the school library I found and read a collection of Matsuo Basho's haiku in English translation. I didn't understand it very well at the time, but it really drew my interest. European poetry is lyric, but Japanese haiku express depth. By not revealing everything, they can suggest many things even in such a short format. I really wanted to learn more about this poetic form and decided to study classical haiku.

I later majored in Japanese literature at the University of Paris, completed my doctoral course, and then was drawn to Kobayashi Issa as I continued my studies on linked verse and haiku. Raised in rural France, I had a bit of a country bumpkin complex, and I think Issa's circumstances and rebellious spirit really resonated with me. I also appreciated that he lived as he pleased yet wrote about the feelings of the weak, and I decided to focus my studies on his haiku. I had written haiku myself in French but while traveling in the south of

France at the age of 25 a Japanese haiku suddenly came to me: *daidai no / hana ni hikarete / haha no umi* [Drawn by the blossoms / Of the bitter orange— / My mother's sea]. Although I was very pleased to have written a haiku in Japanese, at the same time it made me feel that I really needed to live in Japan, so I decided to return.

During the 1998 Olympic Winter Games in Nagano, while serving as a Coordinator for International Relations, I helped welcome visitors from overseas with the "One Haiku for the Olympics" program. I had really looked forward to visiting Shinanomachi, where Issa was born and lived late in life, and when I did I found such wonderful natural surroundings, and nice people, too.

Issa's Appeal

Issa expressed both animism and a rebellious spirit, and loved both humanity and nature. When I first encountered Issa the things I was doing were not getting much recognition, and I found his haiku encouraging. There is an attitude of defiance toward authority in Issa's haiku that is not found in those of Basho, a shout

out to those who might be crushed by the powers that be, an eye for discrimination and the weak. Because Issa was a poet from the countryside in Shinanomachi, he had a rebelliousness not found in the city, and an ability to express things clearly through his haiku. I think this spirit is something the Japan of today really needs.

Favorite Scenery and Spots in Shinanomachi

The earthen storehouse where Issa lived for the last six months of his life—a place emblematic of the Shinshu region. Issa died during the winter, and it must have been desperately cold and dark in the storehouse. There was, however, one south-facing window that let in a ray of sunshine. I think this signifies the attitude of the people of this region, who live their lives guided by conviction. Also Lake Nojiri. I like to take a rowboat out to Bentein Island and sit on the beach at the right side. The view of Mt. Kurohime from there is spectacular—a view of the same mountain that Issa loved.

A Note to Readers

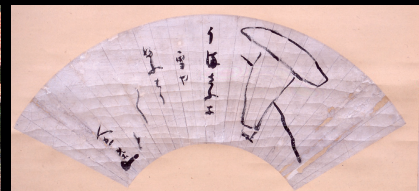
First visit the Issa Memorial Museum to get a sense for Issa. Then go to Bentein Island on Lake Nojiri. After stepping off onto the island, you follow rows of towering cryptomeria up into a sacred world. In Japan it is believed that spirits reside in the trees and the lakes and in all things. This is consistent with the animism of Issa. The essence of travel is coming into contact with people and cultures. Beautiful scenery by itself is not something you remember. Get to know the locals, encounter their culture, and enjoy a trip you will never forget.



The cryptomeria trees on Lake Nojiri's Bentein Island

Kobayashi Issa

Known as one of the Edo period's three great haiku poets, Issa was born in 1763 to a farming family in the town of Kashiwabara along the Hokkoku Kaido post road (now part of Shinanomachi). After his mother died when he was just three years old, his father remarried and had another son. Issa's relationship with his stepmother was fraught and although he was the eldest son he was sent to Edo at the age of 15. In his twenties he decided to become a haiku poet. Although not blessed with a happy family life, he visited students in the northern Shinano area, teaching and publishing haiku, and produced more than 20,000 poems including those collected in *Oraga haru* [The Spring of My Life]. Many of his haiku express a sense of affection for nature, small animals, and children, while others express an antiestablishment spirit. His work has had an enormous influence on contemporary haiku.



Museum

Issa Memorial Museum

Kobayashi Issa (1763–1828) is a much-loved haiku poet of the late Edo period who wrote many poems expressing an affection for the small and the weak, such as *ware to kite / asobe ya oya no / nai suzume* [Come / Play with me / Orphaned sparrow] and *yasegaeru / makeru na issa / kore ni ari* [Scrawny frog / Don't give in / Issa is with you]. Located in Issa's hometown, the Issa Memorial Museum offers an opportunity to reflect on his life and work through the many precious materials in its collection. The facility also includes a local history wing displaying numerous folk items. On-site highlights include the graves of Issa and his family and the commemorative Haikai-ji hermitage. Issa's former home, a nationally designated historic site, is just a short walk away.

Hours: 09:00–17:00

Closed: Last day of May, June, Sept, and Oct (if a Sunday or holiday, closed the next day) (only open weekdays from 1 Dec to 20 Mar)

Admission: Age 16+ ¥500 / Age 6–15 ¥300 (Half price during winter period)





Home to the Most Delicious Corn in Japan
Shinanomachi is famous for its corn. The road leading to Togakushi is lined with cornfields and shops selling grilled corn on the cob. During the peak season in August every shop bustles with people lined up for a this savory treat. The highlands climate with its big large temperature swings between night and day makes for sweet, delicious corn.

Treat yourself: Taste local specialties and stock-up on crafts

1. Kirishita Soba

For buckwheat, the greater the difference in temperature between day and night, the stronger the flavor. The Kurohime area is so cool in the mornings and evening that mist forms even in the summer, making it an ideal spot for growing buckwheat. Flavorful and aromatic with a chewy mouthfeel, soba made from buckwheat grown in Shinanomachi is known as Kirishita Soba ("beneath the mist soba") and has many fans among soba lovers throughout Japan.



2. Shinshu Salmon

A hybrid of rainbow trout, which are meaty and easy to raise, and brown trout, which are resistant to disease, Shinshu salmon bring together the strengths of both in a fish with beautiful silvery skin. Because the fish are sterile, the energy that would normally go to making roe is instead directed to producing a more flavorful flesh known for its fine texture and pleasant, melt-in-the-mouth feel.

3. Matsuo Sake

Matsuo is fine quality Japanese sake made using sake rice grown in the rich natural environment of Shinanomachi without any added exogenous enzymes. In order to produce its full-bodied sake, the brewery has made its yeast mash using wooden *dakidaru* canisters ever since it was founded in 1875.



4. Shinshu Forged Blades

This local tradition began nearly 450 years ago during the Sengoku period when local people learned forging techniques from blacksmiths who had moved to Shinanomachi to make and repair armor and bladed weapons. Shinshu forged blades are known for their toughness, sharpness, and ability to hold an edge, qualities derived from each being carefully hammered into shape being by hand. The biggest difference between Shinshu blades and those produced elsewhere is the extreme thinness of the edge steel, which measures just one-sixth the total thickness of the blade. Great skill is required to produce thin edge steel, which has a major influence on sharpness.



Try Making Soba Noodles in Shinanomachi!

Why not try making your own soba noodles in Shinanomachi, home of Shinshu soba? Just knead, roll, cut, boil, and eat. Whether your noodles are thick or thin, the taste of those you make yourself is always special. Many people in town have mastered the skill of making soba. Learning by watching them can teach you a lot about Japan's culture of soba.



Events



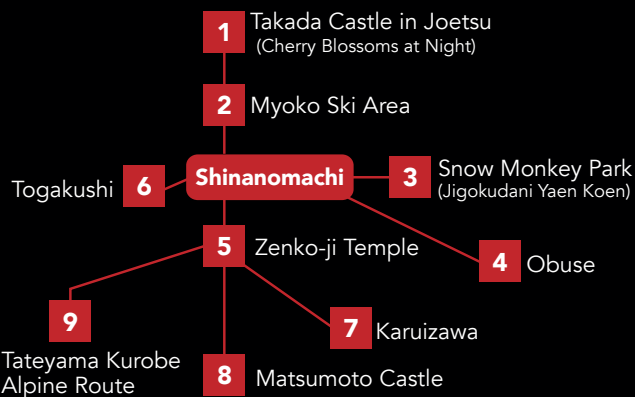
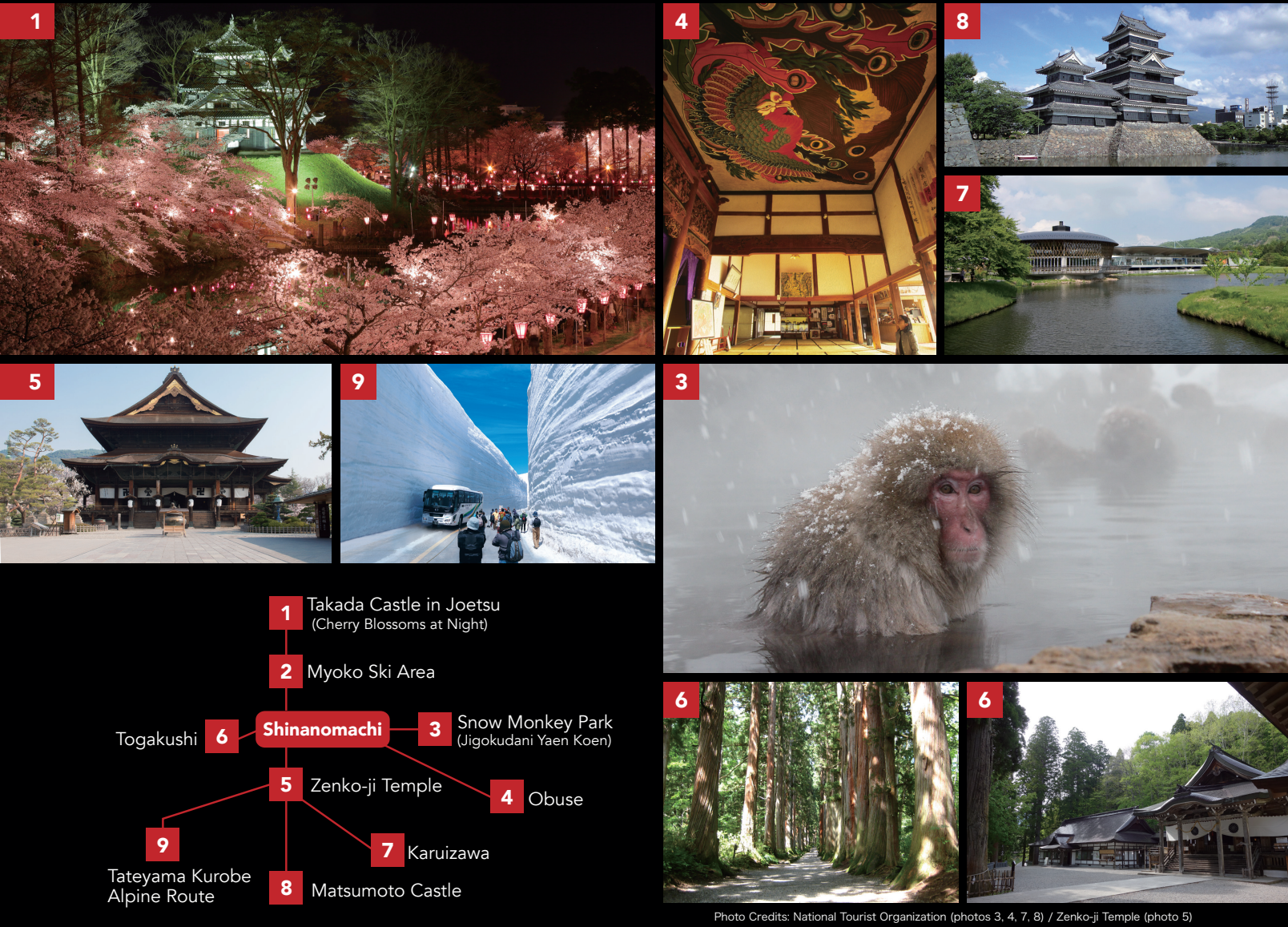
Tradition and Sports

- Jan Dondo yaki bonfires (1)
Cross Country Ski Race (2)
- Apr Lake Nojiri opens
- May Issa Festival (3)
- Jun Kurohime Trail Running Race (4)
- Jul Lake Nojiri Floating Lanterns and Fireworks Festival (5)
Lake Nojiri Triathlon (6)
- Aug Bon Odori Festival (7)
Uga Shrine Festival (8)
- Sep Shin'etsu Five Mountains Trail Running Race
Shin'etsu Five Highland Long Ride
Kurohime Kogen Craft Festival (9)
Autumn festival lion dance (10)
- Nov Start of pond smelt fishing season
- Dec Ski resorts open



Area Attractions

There are many things to do in the Shinanomachi area. You can enjoy the beauty of ancient Japan by visiting Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples rich with history and tradition, experiencing the grandeur of the natural environment, or walking through towns reminiscent of the old days.



- 1. Takada Castle in Joetsu (Cherry Blossoms at Night)** : 35 min by car / 60 min by train + 15 min on foot
Takada Park is renowned as one of the three best spots in Japan for viewing cherry blossoms at night. When the three-tiered turret of Takada Castle is illuminated and the park filled with 3,000 hanging paper lanterns, the reflection in the moat of 4,000 cherry trees creates an intoxicating scene that stirs the hearts of visitors.
- 2. Myoko Ski Area** : 15 min by car / 8 min by train + 15 min by bus / 20 min by Tangram Shuttle Bus
This expansive ski resort located at the foot of Mt. Myoko, with some of the heaviest snowfall in Japan, offers powder snow throughout the season. A variety of hot springs also bubble up throughout the area, making it a perfect spot to relax and explore.
- 3. Snow Monkey Park (Jigokudani Yaen Koen)** : 50 min by car / Tangram Loop Bus (twice a week)
Famous worldwide as the only place in the world where you can see monkeys soaking in hot springs, the monkey park is located in Jigokudani, an area whose name means "Hell valley" because of the geyser that emits a constant stream of hot water and steam.
- 4. Obuse** : 45 min by car / 70 min by train
Obuse is famous for the Hokusai Museum, which displays the work of Edo period ukiyo-e master and painter Katsushika Hokusai, and for a scenic townscape that takes advantage of local history. Known also for growing chestnuts, the town has a number of shops that specialize in chestnut confections, making it a perfect spot to taste and compare a variety of sweets. Pictured is Hokusai's ceiling painting at Gansho-in Temple.
- 5. Zenko-ji Temple** : 30 min by car / 35 min by train
Zenko-ji is one of Japan's most famous temples, with a history dating back 1,400 years. The current main hall, a designated national treasure, joins the Great Buddha Hall at Todai-ji Temple in Nara and the Sanjusangen-do Hall in Kyoto as one of Japan's largest wooden buildings.
- 6. Togakushi** : 15 min by car / 60 min by bicycle
Togakushi Shrine boasts a history of more than 2,000 years at the foot of sacred Mt. Togakushi. The forested approach to the Okusha upper shrine includes a 500-meter stretch lined with cryptomeria that were planted 400 years ago.
- 7. Karuizawa** : 80 min by car / 90 min by train
Karuizawa is one of Japan's most famous summer resorts. The shopping mall adjacent to Karuizawa Station is located in a wonderful natural setting and offers 200 stores including outlet shops for famous brand clothing, interior items, sundries, and outdoor gear.
- 8. Matsumoto Castle** : 80 min by car / 80 min by train
Built roughly 400 years ago during the Sengoku period, Matsumoto Castle is a national treasure and the oldest of Japan's existing castles with five-tiered, six-story keeps. The contrast of white and black makes a magnificent sight against the mountains of the Alps.
- 9. Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route** : 120 min by car / 120 min by train
From 15 April through 22 June, just after the route opens fully for the season, you can take a Snow Wall Walk through a dynamic corridor of snow whose walls stretch more than 10 meters high.

Photo Credits: National Tourist Organization (photos 3, 4, 7, 8) / Zenko-ji Temple (photo 5)

See you in Shinanomachi!



Staying in Shinanomachi

Shinanomachi has many individualistic and homey accommodation facilities including highlands pensions, large-scale resort hotels, cozy inns, and lakeside guesthouses.

Pensions

These small accommodation facilities, usually family run, typically offer a night's lodging together with dinner and breakfast. Each pension has its own personality—whether preparing meals using vegetables from its own garden, offering guided nature tours by the owner, or the opportunity to stay in a detached log house—so you are sure to find one that suits you.

Guesthouses

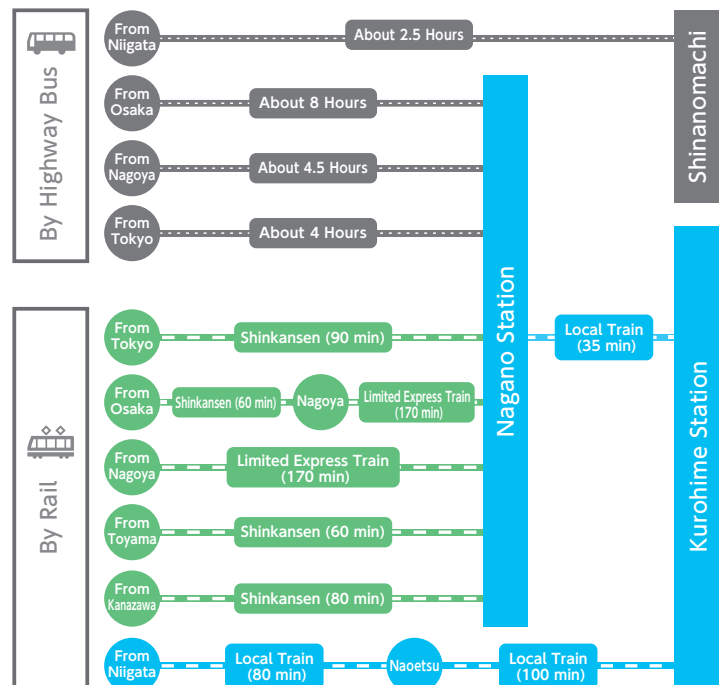
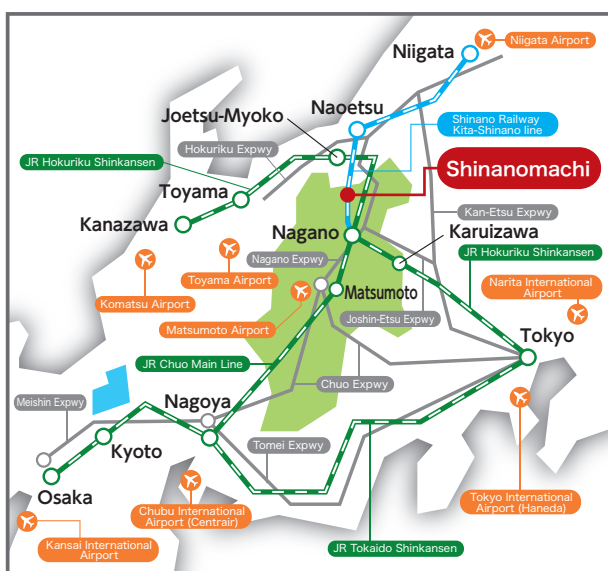
Guesthouses offer basic lodging with a minimum of amenities and no meals, usually with shared, dormitory-style rooms and the opportunity to interact with other travelers in a living room or common space. There are guesthouses connected to outdoor schools and to restaurants and bars, making it easy to enjoy outdoor activities throughout the year as well as the company of fellow travelers.

Hotels

Distinctive hotels can be found dotting each of Shinanomachi's three areas: Kurohime, Lake Nojiri, and Madarao. In addition to location, facilities, and meals, also be sure to check the building's atmosphere, interior furnishings, and the activities available so you can find the one that best suits your tastes and your travel style.



Getting to Shinanomachi



Shinanomachi Tourist Information Center (Kurohime Station)
2692-12 Kashiwabara, Shinano-machi, Nagano-ken
389-1305 Japan
TEL: 026-255-3226 Hours: 09:00-17:00
info@shinano-machi.com

Shinanomachi Industrial Tourism Division
428-2 Kashiwabara, Shinano-machi,
Nagano-ken 389-1392 Japan
syoukougankou@town.shinano.lg.jp

Shinanomachi Official Website
<http://www.shinanomachi-nagano.jp>



Please use e-mail when making inquiries.