

Gokayama Travel Tips

Welcome to Gokayama, a scenic region with two World Heritage Sites!!

Nestled between 1,500m high mountains along the gorge of the Sho River, Gokayama is home to more than 40 small villages. Gokayama is a region located in the southwestern part of Toyama prefecture. The region was once called one of the three hidden places of Japan, given its remote and isolated location.

Its history is thought to date back to as early as the Jōmon period. Legend has it that the defeated warriors of the Taira Clan, who were once prosperous in the ancient capital of Kyoto, fled to Gokayama where they lived secretly in the 12th century. In the 14th century, during the Nanbokuchō Period (South and North Courts Period), some warriors of the South Court came to consider Gokayama as their eternal habitat. In the 15th century, Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land school of Buddhism) was spread throughout Gokayama by Doushu, a native of Gokayama and a disciple of Rennyo, the 8th head priest of the Jōdo Shinshū Honganji Temple. Since then, this religion has become the spiritual essence of the people of Gokayama. During the Ishiyama Honganji War (battle between the powerful warlord Nobunaga and Jōdo Shinshū at Ishiyama Temple in present-day Osaka), pious village people supported Honganji, offering silk and ensho (potassium nitrate gunpowder ingredient). In the Edo Period, Gokayama was ruled by Lord Maeda, the wealthiest provincial lord at the time. During this period, the unique style of triangle thatched roof houses, Gassho-zukuri houses, was developed. Due to the mountainous topography, there were few rice paddies in the region. Instead of growing rice, village people in the Edo Period manufactured other products, such as silk worms, washi (Japanese handmade paper), and ensho (potassium nitrate gunpowder ingredient) to pay the yearly tributes to the ruling clan.

Since 1930, hydroelectric power stations have been constructed along the Sho River. While roofs of the houses in other villages were gradually replaced with tin or tiles, the houses of the Ainokura and Suganuma villages have been preserved in their original form. The two villages were designated as national historic sites in 1970. In 1995, Ainokura and Suganuma were designated as UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Sites, along with Ogimachi in Shirakawa-go, for the traditional Gassho-zukuri houses (praying hands style).

The unique mountain culture of Gokayama has been handed down from generation to generation along with the Gassho-zukuri houses. Explore the natural scenery of Gokayama and its rich cultural heritage!



World Heritage Site
Suganuma 菅沼

Gokayama IC. **Parking** / ¥500 (Cooperation fee for site conservation purposes) English map is available at the parking area. 7-minute walk from the parking area to the village along Rte-156 or a 5-minute walk with elevator ride down. The elevator is located across from the rest rooms in the parking area. ☎0763-67-3008 ☎8:00~17:00(Apr.~Nov. Entry until 16:00), 9:00~16:00(Dec.~Mar. Entry until 15:30) **Bus** / Kaetsuno World Heritage Bus "Suganuma". Just 1 minute walk down to the village. Hokutetsu Bus "Gokayama Suganuma" 10-minute walk from Suganuma Bus Stop. Coin lockers are available at Suganuma Bus Stop bound for Ainokura-guchi.

Look **Gokayama Folklore Museum** This is one of the oldest Gassho-zukuri houses in Suganuma, which has been turned into an exhibition hall. About 200 tools and utensils used for silkworm raising, washi paper making, and daily life are exhibited. The museum introduces the traditional life style of this mountain village. **Ensho no Yakata** (Niter Museum) Exhibition of the production process of ensho(niter), a gunpowder ingredient manufactured in Gokayama during the Edo Period. Under the patronage of Lord Maeda, ensho made in Gokayama was called "Kaga Shoseki" (potassium niter of Kaga) and boasted as superior in quality and quantity throughout the nation. ☎9:00-16:00 Admission: ¥300 for both museums Closed: Dec.29 to Jan.1 **Kago-no-watashi** Used in the Edo Period to cross rivers. The Provincial Kaga Clan did not allow bridges in Gokayama in order to restrict the travel of its people. Visible from Suganuma Bridge and also exhibited in Folklore Museum.

Lunch & Cafe Enjoy local food at **Gorobei, Yohachi, Arai**. Relax at the local café **Tenohira**.

Souvenir Items include local sake Sanshoraku and Gokayama Washi products, sold at **Yohachi, Arai** and **Kappa**.

Event Suganuma Light-Up Event/Sun. in early February, specific days in February & March, late-May



World Heritage Site
Ainokura 相倉

Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings by nation. **Access** **Car** /2km from the crossing of Rte. 156 and Rte. 304, 400m up from Ainokura-guchi bus stop on Rte. 304.

General There are 9 Gassho-zukuri houses in this village, most of which were built at the end of the Edo Period. The village has been preserved for centuries by the efforts of the local people.

The village is also listed as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings by nation. **Access** **Car** / 1km from

Parking / ¥500 (Cooperation fee for site conservation purposes) English map and coin lockers available at the parking area. ☎0763-66-2123

☎8:30~17:00 **Bus** / Kaetsuno World Heritage Bus "Ainokura-guchi". Walk about 400m up to the village. Coin lockers are available at Ainokura-guchi Bus Stop bound for Shirakawago.

View point / 5-minute walk up through the terraced fields from the parking area. **Look** **Ainokura Folklore Museum** Exhibition of items used in traditional settings, such as wedding ceremonies and Buddhist rituals. One-tenth scale of miniature Gassho-zukuri house is also exhibited.

Ainokura Traditional Industry Museum Exhibition of the tools and utensils used in manufacturing three major products in Gokayama in the Edo period (1603-1868): silkworms, ensho (gunpowder ingredient), and washi (handmade paper). ☎8:30-17:00 Open throughout year Admission: ¥500 for both museums **Yusuke** (local inn open to public in daytime) Exhibition of photos of old and present Ainokura on the 2nd floor of the house, taken by the owner. ☎10:00-15:00 Closed: Tuesday Admission: ¥300 **Gokayama Washi Workshop** (Yamazaki House) Try handmade paper making experience. Open May to November. Closed on some weekdays. Variety of Washi items are available.

Lunch & Cafe Enjoy local cuisine and relax at **Matsuya** and **Ainokuraya**.

Souvenir Items include local sake Sanshoraku and Gokayama Washi products, sold at **Matsuya, Ainokuraya**.

Accommodations There are six local Gassho-zukuri inns (Minshuku). Experience staying in a traditional Gassho-zukuri house. The price is 10,000yen and up per person including dinner & breakfast. Advanced reservation required. Inquire at the Gokayama Tourist Information Center for reservations. E-mail / mail@gokayama-info.jp

Gassho-zukuri Minshuku **Yusuke, Shoshichi, Gassho Nakaya, Yomoshiro, Choyomon, Goyomon**.

Event Lighting of the village in Ainokura / mid-February, late-April, mid-August, mid-September, late-November



Nishiakao
西赤尾

Access **Car**/3km south of Suganuma on Rte. 156. **Parking**/ Free **Bus**/ Kaetsuno World Heritage Bus "Nishiakao"

Look **Iwase-ke** The largest Gassho-zukuri house in the region, designated as an national important cultural property. Acting as the chief trader of regional ensho in the Edo period, the officials of the Kaga Clan

stayed in this house to buy ensho made in Gokayama. The ground floor was built from the keyaki tree (high quality, zelkova hard wood). Iwase-ke is a 5 story house. ☎0763-67-3338 ☎9:00~17:00 (Dec.~Mar. until 16:00) Closed: Thursday Admission: ¥300 **Gyotokuji Temple** The biggest and oldest temple in Gokayama. Its founder Doushu monk spread Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism throughout Gokayama.

Lunch & Cafe **Simizuya** Local café restaurant. **Iwana** has a variety of local dishes such as savory iwana (river trout) sushi. **Kurumi** has soba and udon.

Souvenir **Chinpindo** and **Mansaku** Local food and crafts are available.

Accommodations Ryokan **Akaokan**.