

Gifu Prefecture Tourism and Event Newsletter

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Gifu Crossroads

To think that 2015 is already coming to a close! It's been a year of interesting events and great memories, but Gifu (the Hida region up north in particular) doesn't dwell on the past. It's time for cold weather and snow - lots of it. As we move into the beginning of 2016, a wealth of interesting events and spectacles can be found across the prefecture. In addition to the events listed below, those detailed in previous winter editions of Gifu Crossroads can still be enjoyed as well (visit the Gifu Crossroads website for more information). Unforgettable illumination showcases the region's stunning seasonal beauty, facilities prepare activities where guests can enjoy frolicking in the snow, and nothing is quite as satisfying as taking a dip in a hot spring on a cold day. For a fantastic way to make the most of this calming time of year, consider stopping a while in Gifu Prefecture.



Shirakawa-go Winter Illumination
January: 16th, 23th, 24th, 30th, 31st
February: 7th, 14th

This highly popular event that happens just 7 nights each year has the snow-covered *gassho-zukuri* buildings of Shirakawa-go illuminated, creating an entirely unique atmosphere that cannot be experienced anywhere else. Shirakawa-go is beautiful all times of the year, but is arguably most famous for its spectacular snowscapes that capture the hearts and imaginations of wintertime visitors.

The illumination can be seen from 5:30pm to 7:30pm on the nights that it is conducted, but buses are no longer running by the time the festivities begin, making it necessary to either arrange lodgings in the village or personal transportation if planning to attend.



Open for only a few months each year, the Subzero Forest shifts between a variety of colors throughout the day, making the most of these beautiful frozen landscapes that surround the Akigami Hot Spring. A wonderful option if looking for a relaxing place to spend the night, guests at the Akigami Hot Spring Inn can experience the unique charms of wintertime scenery, hot springs, and local cooking all at once.

Due to its proximity to Takayama, this location is ideal for those who want to enjoy the traditional sights and sounds of Takayama in addition to spectacular illumination.

Akigami Hot Spring – Subzero Forest
The Subzero Forest is open from January 1st to March 31st, with illumination until 9:00pm
1-hour bus ride from Takayama Station

Located 900 meters above sea level, among the 80 or so limestone caverns in Japan that open to tourists, this one is located at the highest elevation. Sporting an magnificent array of limestone and stalactites, the very existence of this enormous cave is a miracle in itself.

During the winter months, the mountains that make up the slope along the cavern are coated in ice that reaches over 30 meters tall and 300 meters across. Illuminated from sunset until 8:00pm exclusively in February, visitors can explore the cave anytime between 9:00am to 4:00pm, and then enjoy the dazzling spectacle of lights that illuminate its “Frozen Valley”.



Hida Great Limestone Cave – Frozen Valley
The Frozen Valley can be explored from January 10th to March 10th
30-minute bus ride from Takayama Station



Kanzarashi is an event that is held on January 20th and February 1st, which are considered the two coldest days of the year according to the solar calendar. Using a dyeing process called *Gujo Honzome* (an Important Intangible Cultural Property of Gifu Prefecture), carp streamers called *koinobori* in Japanese are washed in the cold waters of the Yoshida River, which both clean them and cause the fabric to tighten.

Enduring cold that cuts right to the bone, the successors to the *Gujo Honzome* legacy put their skills on display in the Hachiman-cho area of Gujo City, on the stretch of the Yoshida River that lies between the Miyagashi and Shinbashi bridges.

Kanzarashi on the Yoshida River
January 20th and February 1st
10-minute drive from the Gujo Hachiman Interchange of the Tokai-Hokuriku Expressway

Nestled deep in the Japanese Alps is Gifu Prefecture's Okuhida Hot Springs Village, which boasts more open-air hot spring baths than any other area in the country. There are five hot spring villages in total (Hirayu, Fukuji, Shinhirayu, Tochio, and Shinhotaka), each with its own charms. The area is not just hot springs, however, as it has many other beautiful attractions as well. One of which, the Hirayu Great Waterfall, is a breathtaking 64 meters tall and 6 meters wide, and is known as one of the three finest waterfalls in the northern region of Gifu Prefecture.

Beautiful regardless of season, the Hirayu Great Waterfall is most well known for the Hirayu Waterfall Festival that occurs in February, during the coldest time of the year. The waterfall freezes over, and is then illuminated so as to let visitors enjoy its otherworldly atmosphere. To get there, all you need to do is take a Nohi Bus bound for Shinhotaka from JR Takayama Station to the Hirayu Bus Terminal, and walk the rest of the way. It's lovely in the winter and there are beautiful views to be enjoyed from the top of the Shinhotaka Ropeway, so I suggest staying the night!



Hirayu Waterfall Festival
February 15th to 25th
1-hour bus ride and 20-minute walk
from Takayama Station



Bokka no Sato - Winter Season
December 12th - March 28th

4-minute drive from the Hirugano Kogen Smart
Interchange of the Tokai-Hokuriku Expressway

Enjoy a day of excitement at Gujo City's Bokka no Sato nature park! Visitors can interact with different animals at the petting zoo, try different activities like craft-making or bread-baking, or engage in a wide variety of different experiences that use the area's natural abundance of snow! Bokka no Sato also has its own restaurants and stores, so guests can fill up on delicious food after working up an appetite playing outside. What's more, the ice cream served at Bokka no Sato is to die for! Created using locally produced milk that has a particularly high fat content, people will often line up just to get a taste - even in the winter!

While it is perfect location for families or for people looking to make the most of the winter season, Bokka no Sato is a bit off the beaten path, and difficult to get to unless you have access to your own vehicle.

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