

Shirakawa

Gifu Prefecture · Japan

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Shirakawa-gō is a mountain village in the Shō river valley in Gifu Prefecture. Its hamlet of Ogimachi has farmhouses with steep, thatched roofs in the gasshō-zukuri style. "Gasshō" means "praying hands", the shape of the roof. The roofs shed the heavy winter snow. Together with Gokayama in Toyama Prefecture, the village has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1995.

People still live and farm in Ogimachi. The residents follow three rules: do not sell, do not rent and do not destroy the houses. The village suits a day trip by bus. A night in a farmhouse inn gives you the quiet streets after the day visitors leave.

When to visit

Winter brings the famous snow scenes. Heavy snow falls from December to March, and the village is cold. Cherry trees bloom from mid to late April. Summer is green, but July and August are warm and humid. The leaves in and around the village turn red and yellow from late October to early November. Some mountain roads around Hakusan close in winter.

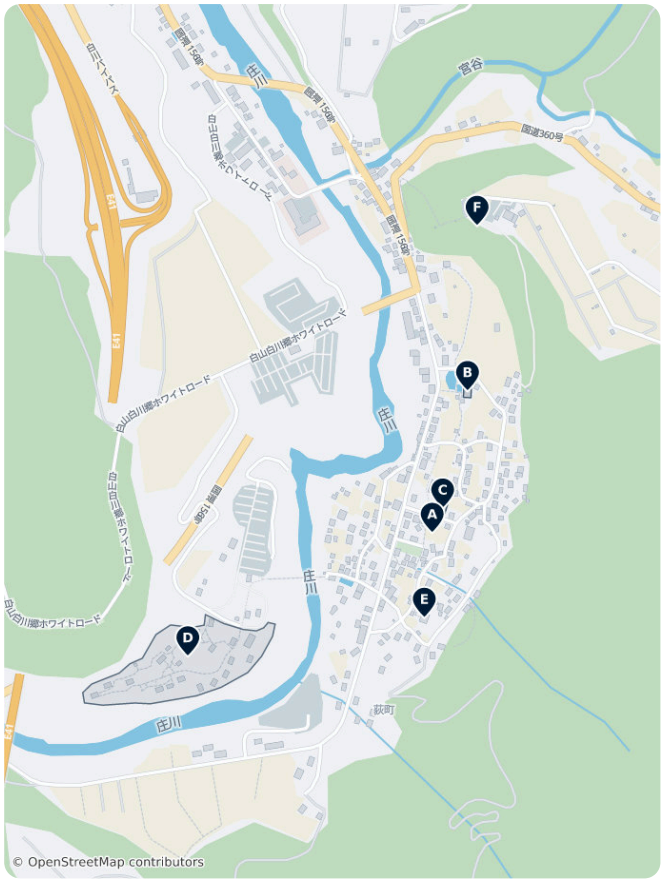
The biggest event is the winter light-up on four evenings in January. It is open only by advance reservation (see Experiences).

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for sightseeing	2° / 6° Feels like -4°	-3° / -8°	24 rainy days · Dry air
February	Poor Poor for sightseeing	3° / 10° Feels like -3°	-4° / -9°	19 rainy days · Dry air
March	Poor Poor for sightseeing	8° / 16° Feels like 3°	0° / -5°	16 rainy days · Dry air
April	Good Good for hiking	14° / 21° Feels like 10°	5° / -1°	13 rainy days · Dry air
May	Good Good for sightseeing	20° / 25°	10° / 5°	12 rainy days · Dry air
June	Great Great for sightseeing	24° / 28°	16° / 11°	14 rainy days · Calm winds
July	Good Good for sightseeing	27° / 31°	20° / 16°	18 rainy days · Muggy, humid air
August	Fair Fair for sightseeing	28° / 32°	21° / 18°	16 rainy days · Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
September	Good Good for sightseeing	24° / 30°	17° / 12°	16 rainy days · Humid air
October	Good Good for sightseeing	18° / 24°	11° / 5°	15 rainy days · Dry air
November	Fair Fair for hiking	12° / 19° Feels like 8°	5° / 0°	18 rainy days · Dry air
December	Poor Poor for sightseeing	5° / 12° Feels like 0°	0° / -5°	24 rainy days · Dry air

Best months: June

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights



- A Shirakawa-gō is the old farming hamlet of Ogimachi. Walk the lanes, rice fields and canals. Cars cannot use the main street. Do not enter private houses or gardens.
- B Wada House is the largest gasshō-zukuri house in the village and a national Important Cultural Property. The first and second floors are open. English explanations are on the second floor. Entry is 400 yen for adults and 200 yen for children, open 9:00 to 17:00.
- C Kanda House shows the inside structure of a gasshō house. You can also see the place under the floor where gunpowder was made. Entry is 400 yen, open 9:00 to 16:00, closed on Wednesdays. Nearby, Nagase House has five floors and costs 300 yen.
- D Gasshozukuri Minkaen Outdoor Museum is an open-air museum of moved gasshō houses beside the main car park. Entry is 600 yen. Opening hours are 8:40 to 17:00 from March to November and 9:00 to 16:00 from December to February. It is closed on Thursdays from December to March.
- E Myozenji Temple Main Hall belongs to the largest temple in the village. The main hall, kitchen and clock tower are in gasshō style. The museum costs 300 yen.
- F Ogimachi Castle Observation Deck gives the classic view over the village from the castle ruins hill. It is free. Walk 15 to 20 minutes on the path behind Wada House.

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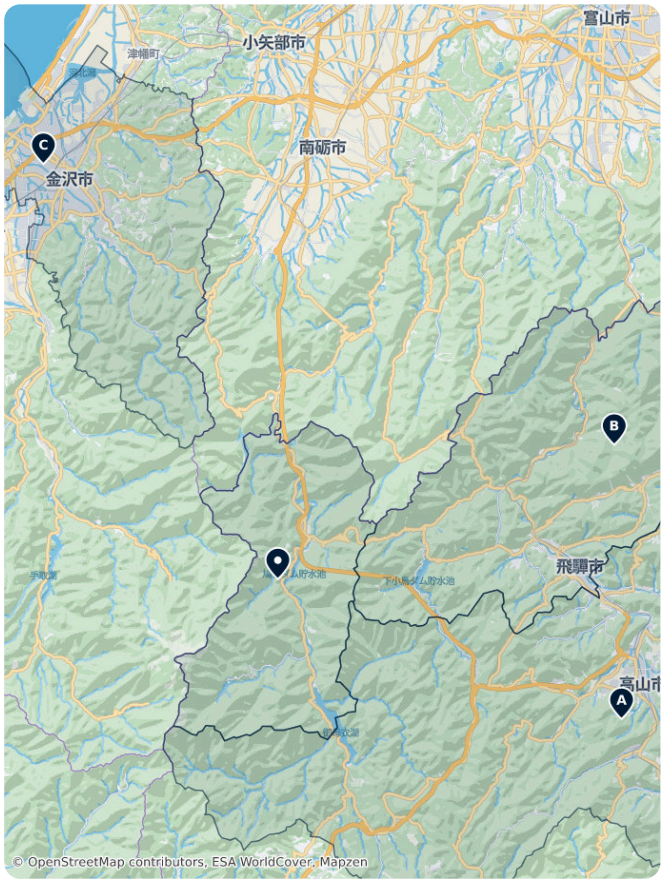
What to experience

- Stay overnight in a farmhouse inn. Over 40 inns and guesthouses are in gasshō or traditional buildings. All need a reservation. Day visitors cannot enter the village after dark, so overnight guests have the streets to themselves.
- Winter light-up. The village is lit from 17:30 to 19:30 on four January evenings (11, 17, 24 and 31 January in 2027). **Entry is only by advance reservation.** Tickets are not sold on the day, and a gate checks tickets from 15:30. Choose one of these ways in: stay overnight (rooms are allocated by lottery in autumn), reserve a space in the event car park (7,000 yen for up to 5 people in the second round, open from 1 December 2026), or join a special tour bus from one of five highway bus companies. The viewing deck is only for overnight guests and some bus tours. Tripods and drones are banned. Event details
- Soak in a hot spring. Shirakawago no Yu is 2 minutes from the bus terminal. It has an open-air bath with a view of the Shō river. Check the current fee at the door.
- Doburoku Festival. From 14 to 19 October, shrines in the village hold festivals with doburoku, a cloudy rice wine. Shirakawa Hachiman Shrine is one of them.

Day trips

Closest trips first:

- Gokayama (Toyama Prefecture): two more World Heritage hamlets. Suganuma Village is about 25 minutes by car. Ainokura Village is about 40 minutes by car. Some buses stop at Gokayama Suganuma from April to November.
- Hirase and Hakusan: the Hirase hot spring area is about 15 minutes by car. Mount Hakusan is one of Japan's three sacred mountains. Roads to its high trailheads close in winter.
- Ⓐ Takayama: about 50 minutes by bus. It is the usual base on the Hida side.
- Ⓑ Hida: the town of Hida-Furukawa is about 1 hour by car.
- Ⓒ Kanazawa: about 1 hour 20 minutes by bus. It is the main city on the Hokuriku side.



Where to explore

Other places in Gifu Prefecture:

- Takayama is the main town of the Hida region and the closest city by bus.
- Hida lies north of Takayama and is reached by road.
- Gifu is the prefecture capital. Gifu Bus links it to Shirakawa-gō with a transfer.

Getting there

Shirakawa-gō has no railway. Long-distance buses are the main way to arrive, and they stop at the Shirakawa-go Bus Terminal, a 1-minute walk from the village.

- By bus from Takayama: about 50 minutes, 16 round trips a day. Fares run from about 2,800 to 2,900 yen one way. Some departures are reservation-only.
- By bus from Kanazawa or Toyama: both about 1 hour 20 minutes. Kanazawa costs about 2,800 to 2,900 yen and Toyama about 2,400 yen. Some departures are reservation-only.
- By bus from Nagoya: about 2 hours 30 minutes from the Meitetsu Bus Center. Seats are reservation-only and fares change by date, about 3,600 to 4,700 yen. Booking opens one month before the trip.
- Delays: buses can run 2 hours or more late because of car queues at the village, heavy snow or expressway closures. Book a later return bus.
- By train and bus: take the JR Hida limited express from Nagoya to Takayama (about 2 hours 20 minutes), or the Hokuriku Shinkansen to Toyama or Kanazawa, then the bus.
- By air: the nearest airports are Toyama and Komatsu. From Komatsu, an airport bus takes about 40 minutes to Kanazawa Station.
- By car: about 1 hour 10 minutes from Kanazawa and about 2 hours 15 minutes from Nagoya on expressways.

Shirakawa-go Tourist Association: access · Nohi Bus: Takayama–Shirakawa-go

Getting around

- On foot: Ogimachi is small, and walking is the only way to see it. Plan 2 to 3 hours. From the bus terminal, Wada House is 3 minutes away, Kanda House 7, Nagase House 8, Myozenji 10 and the open-air museum 12.
- Viewpoint: you can walk up in 15 to 20 minutes on the path behind Wada House. A shuttle bus also serves it, with a stop about 5 minutes on foot from the bus terminal. Ask at the tourist office for the shuttle times.
- From the car park: a suspension bridge leads to the village in about 2 minutes.
- Payment: carry cash. Small houses and museums mostly take cash only.

Shirakawa-go Tourist Association

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

Ogimachi is small and the main street is closed to cars. Snow and ice make walking harder in winter.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Low

The village is small and snow covers the roads in winter.

Driving

- Is a car worth it? Not for Ogimachi itself, because buses stop at the village. A car helps for Gokayama, Hirase and a loop with Takayama and Kanazawa. Traffic drives on the left.
- Licence: Japan accepts **only an International Driving Permit issued under the 1949 Geneva Convention**. A 1968 Vienna Convention permit is not valid. Licences from Switzerland, Germany, France, Belgium, Monaco and Taiwan need an official Japanese translation from JAF instead. The permit or translation is valid for up to one year from entry.
- Parking: use the village car park, Seseragi Park. It costs 2,000 yen per car, open 8:00 to 17:00 with last entry at 16:30. If it is full, staff send you to the Midashima or Terao lots.
- Winter: studless winter tires are required. Chains are also advised. Snow falls from December to March.
- Light-up days: the car park rules change. Evening visits need a reserved parking space. Ordinary cars are moved to the Terao lot by 15:00, so arrive early and check the event rules.

Food & drink

The village is known for tofu and soy products, including soy milk, fried tofu and "stone tofu". Other local foods are horse chestnut mochi, hoba tea and doburoku-flavoured yokan. Hida beef and hoba miso are common on menus. In the Hirase hot spring area, try suttate nabe, a hot pot with Hida beef.

Most eating places are along the main street of Ogimachi. Choices run from soba and udon shops and cafes to restaurants for Hida beef and local dishes. Farmhouse inns serve dinner to guests.

What to eat & drink

DINNER

Sushi · 寿司 (Sushi)
Vinegared rice paired with raw fish, seafood, or vegetables; ranges from casual conveyor-belt shops to high-end counters.

Ramen · ラーメン (Ramen)
Wheat noodles in a meat or fish-based broth, with countless regional styles.

Tempura · 天ぷら (Tempura)
Lightly battered, deep-fried seafood and vegetables.

Okonomiyaki · お好み焼き (Okonomiyaki)
A savory grilled pancake with cabbage and a choice of fillings, popular in Osaka and Hiroshima.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Onigiri · おにぎり (Onigiri)
Rice balls wrapped in seaweed, often with a savory filling; an everyday convenience-store staple.

Yakitori · 焼き鳥 (Yakitori)
Grilled skewers of chicken, popular at izakaya alongside beer or sake.

DRINKS

Green Tea · 緑茶 (Ryokucha)
The everyday non-alcoholic drink, served hot or cold.

Sake · 日本酒 (Nihonshu)
Rice wine served warm or chilled, a traditional accompaniment to a meal.

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Safety & health

Shirakawa-gō is very safe. Winter is the main risk. People slip often on snow and ice, even when it is not snowing. Wear boots with good grip, not heels. Roads can close in heavy snow.

Residents live in the village. Do not enter private houses or gardens, and do not fly drones. Bring a flashlight if you walk at night, and expect insects in summer. Bears live in the mountains, so check local notices before you hike.

History

Mountains and heavy snow kept Shirakawa-gō cut off for long periods. Farming land is scarce, so from the middle of the Edo period people raised silkworms in the large attics of their houses. Wada House belonged to a family that led the village. Its trade in silk and in gunpowder ingredients was an important income.

The villagers made gunpowder material under the floors of their houses. You can see the place in Kanda House. The hill with the viewpoint, Ogimachi Castle Observation Deck, was the site of a medieval mountain castle.

The village area became a preservation district in 1976 and a World Heritage Site in 1995. Villagers keep the roofs by working together, a custom called "yui". Neighbours help to renew the thatch.

Country facts

Here are the essentials for traveling in Japan:

CURRENCY
JPY ¥

ELECTRICITY

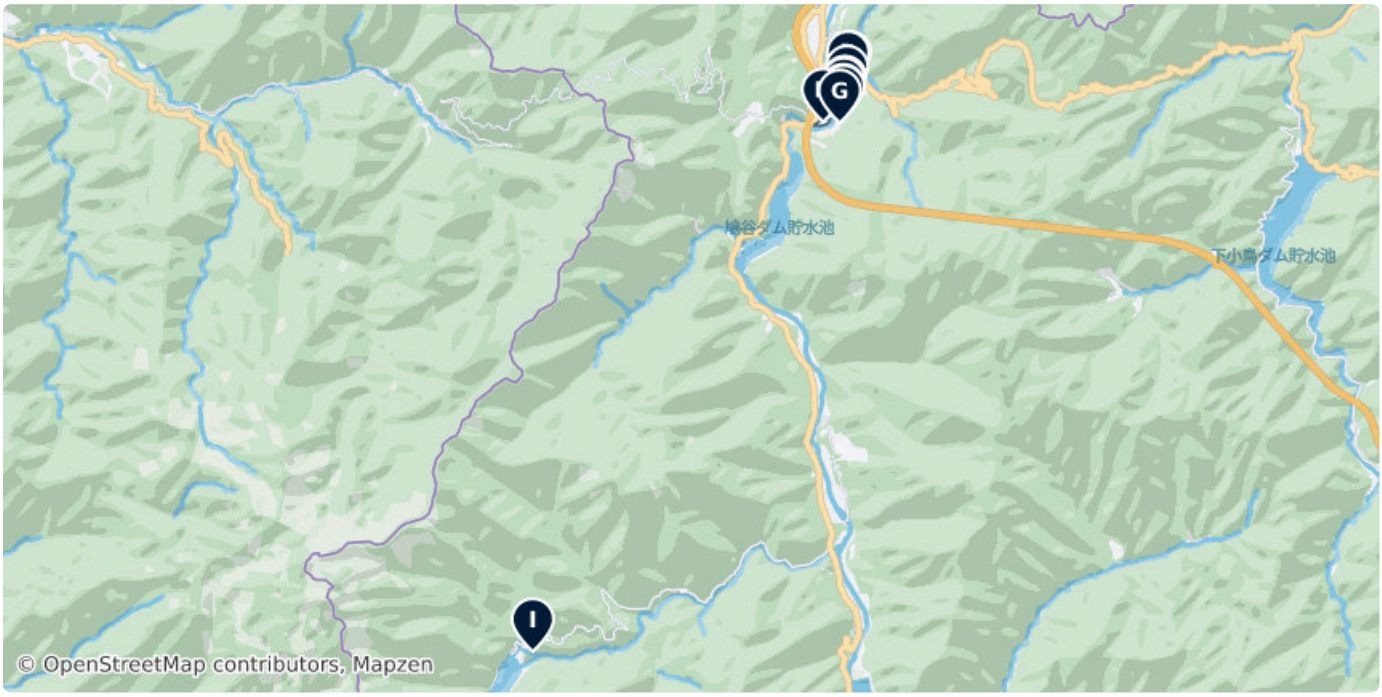
Type A / Type B
100 V

LANGUAGES
Japanese

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Shirakawa Essentials

Shirakawa-go, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Gifu Prefecture, is defined by its Ogimachi village featuring over 100 gassho-zukuri farmhouses. These steep, thatched-roof structures, some over 250 years old, were engineered to withstand the region's massive winter snowfall. The list includes the Wada and Kanda family residences, the thatched Myozenji Temple, and observation points overlooking the valley. Beyond the village, the 76-meter Shiramizu Falls showcases the natural landscape of the Hakusan National Park.





A Shirakawa-go

The Historic Village of Shirakawa-gō is located in the beautiful valley, surrounded by mountains known for heavy snowfall.

(Unnamed Road), Japan (36.25735, 136.90683)

shirakawa-go.gr.jp



B Ogimachi Castle Observation Deck

Panoramic viewpoint located on the site of a former 15th-century mountain castle, offering elevated views of the gassho-zukuri farmhouses across the valley.

(Unnamed Road), Japan (36.26293, 136.90785)

C Ogimachi Castle Observation Deck

Elevated observation point providing a full view of the Ogimachi village. Accessible via a walking trail or a shuttle bus from the village center.

(36.26300, 136.90841)



D Wada house

The largest and oldest gassho-zukuri farmhouse in the village. This designated Important Cultural Property features a preserved interior and exhibits on traditional silk production.

Japan (36.25992, 136.90763)

Mo–Su 09:00–17:00



E Kanda house

A well-preserved farmhouse museum where visitors can explore multiple floors, including the attic used for silkworm cultivation and the central hearth area.

(Unnamed Road), Japan (36.25779, 136.90707)

Mo–Su 09:00–17:00



F Myozenji Temple

A rare Jodo Shinshu sect temple featuring a main hall, priest's quarters, and a bell tower gate all constructed with traditional thatched roofs.

(Unnamed Road), Japan (36.25580, 136.90666)



G Shirakawa Hachiman Shrine

A historic Shinto shrine located at the edge of the village, known for hosting the annual Doburoku Festival and housing a hall dedicated to unrefined sake.

(36.25486, 136.90570)



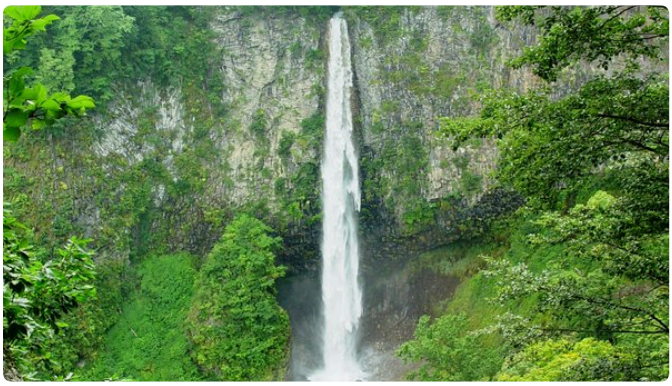
H The Heritage Museum

An open-air museum consisting of 26 relocated gassho-zukuri buildings, including farmhouses, a watermill, and a shrine, showcasing historical rural life.

国道156号 (36.25510, 136.90133)

Mo–Su	08:40–17:00

shirakawago-minkaen.jp



I Shiramizu Falls

A 76-meter-high waterfall fed by the emerald waters of Lake Hakusui, located within the scenic forests of the Hakusan National Park.

Japan (36.14354, 136.82554)

J Myozenji Museum

Located within the Myozenji Temple complex, this museum displays traditional farming tools, household items, and artifacts related to the history of the local community.

(Unnamed Road), Japan (36.25606, 136.90659)

Dec-Mar Mo–Su	09:00–17:00
Apr-Nov Mo–Su	08:30–17:00

DATA SOURCES

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