Japan Tourism Spotlight by JNTO Japan National Tourism Organization

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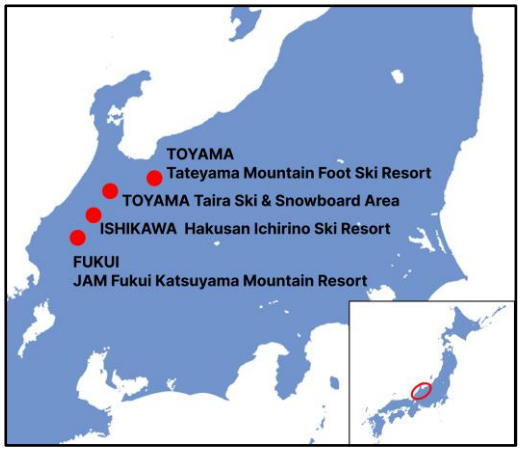
Hokuriku's Winter Resorts Offer Abundant High-Quality Snow Waiting to Be Discovered

A skier enjoys a ride on the fresh snow at JAM Fukui Katsuyama Mountain Resort.



Japan's coveted powder snow has attracted skiers and snowboarders from around the world. Still, many of the inbound skiers are said to concentrate on a handful of well-known winter resorts in Japan, such as Niseko in Hokkaido and Hakuba in Nagano Prefecture.

This issue will put the spotlight on less internationally known ski resorts in Hokuriku, comprising the prefectures of Toyama, Ishikawa and Fukui, which face the Sea of Japan. Hokuriku is in fact one of the snowiest regions in Japan, and many of its winter resorts, though still relatively undiscovered by overseas travelers, boast high-quality snow falling in abundance. Access to the region is easy from major cities such as Tokyo and Osaka via the Hokuriku Shinkansen Line and expressway networks. The region is also rich in travel resources that enable visitors to

combine winter sports with cultural tourism, including a visit to the UNESCO World Heritage-listed historic villages of Gokayama, known for their traditional “Gassho-zukuri” farmhouses.

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1. Enjoying High-Quality “Japow” in Fukui’s “Dinosaur Town”

JAM Fukui Katsuyama Mountain Resort has a variety of courses and tree-run areas.

Hokuriku is one of Japan’s snowiest regions. Thanks to abundant snowfall brought by winter winds from the Sea of Japan, the region offers excellent ski conditions. At higher elevations, visitors can also enjoy powder snow. Among ski and snowboard enthusiasts, Japan’s powder snow is widely known as “Japow.”

JAM Fukui Katsuyama Mountain Resort in Fukui Prefecture is one of those ski resorts in Hokuriku where visitors can enjoy skiing and snowboarding on the Japow-covered slopes. Among the largest in western Japan, this winter resort features 12 courses and three tree-run areas that enable a maximum run of 5,800 meters.

Its wide space is divided into three sites (from lower to higher altitude); the “Variety Site” for beginners to advanced riders; the “Fantasy Site” for intermediate to advanced riders; and the “Illusion Site” near the summit, where skiers and snowboarders can enjoy ungroomed powder snow as they tackle the tree runs built for advanced to top-level riders. Boasting plentiful snow accumulating to a depth of 3 to 4 meters, the Illusion Site has the most-challenging “Extreme Course” with the resort’s steepest incline of 37 degrees, designed for experts only.

JAM MID BASE is a new area that opened at the Fantasy Site, enabling beginners as well as those

without ski or snowboard to play on the snow and enjoy a panoramic view from an altitude of some 1,000 meters. Snow rafting allows visitors to experience snow-sliding aboard a rafting board pulled by a snowmobile. The Kids Park is one of the largest of its kind in western Japan, featuring areas for snow play, snow striders, sledding and various other activities for small children. Visitors can also relax after a day of winter sports at the hot-spring bath at the hotel right at the foot of the ski area.

Visitors with small children enjoy snow rafting in the JAM MID BASE area (left); The T-rex robot is among the exhibits of the Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum ©Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum (right).

Katsuyama is also famous as a “dinosaur town,” a treasure trove of fossils from the prehistoric creatures. You can combine this winter sports joy with an experience of the dinosaur world by dropping by the Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum, known as one of the world’s leading museums of its kind. Katsuyama City is one of Japan’s most important dinosaur fossil localities, and six new species have so far been discovered in Katsuyama’s Kitadani excavation site—one of the largest such sites in this country. In honor of the city’s prehistoric legacy, T-rex races are held at JAM Fukui Katsuyama Mountain, a fun event in which participants in inflatable dinosaur suits run up the ski slopes.

Among the museum’s permanent exhibitions is the Dinosaur World, which explores these prehistoric creatures through a life-size dinosaur diorama depicting a Jurassic forest, animatronics, and a computer-generated motion picture. Some of the skeletons exhibited in the hall contain a significant amount of original fossil material.
JAM Fukui Katsuyama Mountain Resort
Fukui Prefectural Dinosaur Museum

2. Skiing at the Foot of Mt. Tateyama/Tasting Toyama's Seafood

Panoramic views from atop the courses at Tateyama Mountain Foot Ski Resort ©Toyama City Tourism Association

Located at the foot of the 3,000-meter-class Tateyama Mountains, at the northern end of the Northern Japan Alps, the Tateyama Mountain Foot Ski Resort is one of the largest in the Hokuriku region. Featuring ski runs of up to 3,000 meters-long from its 1,188-meter summit, the resort offers breathtaking views of the Toyama Plain and Toyama Bay from the peak of the ski area.

The resort has eight courses, including three ungroomed ones designed for advanced-level riders, and comprises two areas; Gokurakuzaka features a variety of slopes making use of the natural terrain and suitable for both beginners and advanced riders, while Raicho Valley has mainly spacious courses fit for beginners and family skiers.

Overall, it offers visitors the chance to fully enjoy Hokuriku's powder snow and panoramic views. Family skiers wishing to play with their small children in the snow may find the kids' park in Raicho Valley and sledding area in the Gokurakuzaka area useful.

A bowl of white shrimp on rice (left) and sushi made with catches from Toyama Bay (right)
©Toyama City Tourism Association

With the resort's convenient access to central Toyama City (about an hour by either car or local train), visitors have the option of combining winter sports with the season's culinary delights. Toyama Bay is famous for its abundant catch of seafood—which is best in winter—including

white shrimp, winter yellowtail, firefly squid, as well as sushi made with these catches. After a day of skiing, visitors can warm up with a soak in the hot springs at the Tateyama Sanroku Onsen. Tateyama Mountain Foot Ski Resort

3. Technically Challenging Runs near a World Heritage Site

Taira Ski & Snowboard Area ©Gokayama NANTO Tourism Organization

Located in the mountainous area near the southwestern end of Toyama Prefecture, Taira Ski & Snowboard Area has four courses designed for skiers and snowboarders of varying skill levels, including the Dynamic Course certified by the International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS) for mogul competition. This year, the FIS Freestyle World Cup competition was held in this ski area for the first time.

Despite its compact layout, the area's abundant snowfall and the high-quality snow on its north-facing courses give advanced skiers a chance to enjoy technically challenging runs. It is also one of the rare ski areas featuring cross-country courses close by; the Taira Cross-Country Area has 3 km, 5 km, 7.5 km and 10 km trails certified by the Ski Association of Japan.

Snow-capped Gassho-style traditional farmhouses in a Gokayama village
©Gokayama Information Center

One of the key advantages of Taira Ski & Snowboard Area is its proximity to the Gokayama historic villages, well known for their traditional “Gassho-zukuri” farmhouses. In 1995, the Ainokura and Suganuma villages in Gokayama, together with Shirakawa-go in neighboring Gifu Prefecture, were inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage sites. They are the only village communities in Japan that retain Gassho-style houses, with fewer than 200 remaining today. The steeply pitched thatched roofs were designed to cope with snowfall that can reach as much as 3 meters in winter, allowing snow to slide off naturally and reflecting the ingenuity of people living in one of Japan’s snowiest regions.

People slide down a mountain slope using the “Benta” board (left); Members of a program to make their original Benta boards exhibit their crafts (right). ©Gokayama NANTO Tourism Organization

People in snow-bound regions have historically developed various games and activities that took advantage of plentiful snowfall. In the past, children of Gokayama created a piece of equipment for such play from wooden boards with ropes attached for carrying luggage. The device, locally called “Benta,” was recently revived as a tool for a simple winter sport. Players hold the rope attached to the board’s front as they use it to slide down the snowy mountain slopes, either sitting, like on a sled, or standing, like on a snowboard. Gokayama NANTO Tourism Organization launched a project in 2024 to make use of this local tradition as a new snow activity resource, organizing programs for visitors to enjoy Benta runs and experience crafting their own boards.
Taira Snow Park & Cross Country Area (in Japanese)
Gokayama Saisai: Gokayama Official Travel Guide

What a Revived Small Ski Area in Toyama Can Offer

Small-scale ski areas in Hokuriku can offer visitors a more laid-back, cozy, and community-oriented winter sports experience, says Matsui Kazuhiro, general manager of Awasuno Ski Resort at the foot of Mt. Tateyama. Matsui now leads the efforts to revive the small ski area in his hometown of Awasuno in Toyama City.

“We have international guests, not only from Asia but from snowy countries like Norway, who said they wanted to enjoy snow in Japan’s ‘local’ ski area,” says Matsui. Both the visitors and the staff at Awasuno are mostly Toyama natives, and its operator tries to flexibly meet the guests’ requests—such as arranging for night skiing and holding

fireworks events—all while being welcoming to beginners. This approach does not change when it welcomes guests from overseas, so that all visitors to Awasuno can really feel at home.

One of the advantages of Awasuno, according to Matsui, is its proximity to central Toyama (about an hour's drive away), which gives visitors more choices for how to spend their time. "Visitors may stay in the city and come to Awasuno to ski whenever they feel like it."

Matsui says the snow in Hokuriku is notable for its "softer" feel and higher water content compared with the powder snow in Tohoku or Hokkaido. When it gets cold for days in February, the wind blows moisture off the fallen snow and makes the snow drier, but the snow still retains its softer feel as you ride down the slopes. "That happens under certain weather conditions, and local enthusiasts eagerly wait for that moment," he said.

Awasuno Ski Resort once faced closure amid the decline of Japan's ski industry and the COVID-19 pandemic. Matsui worked with local supporters to revive the resort, while a crowdfunding campaign raised three times its initial target, demonstrating strong support for the project. Six years later, those efforts helped triple sales at Awasuno. Its recovery highlights the unique appeal and future potential of Hokuriku's small-scale ski areas, from their community atmosphere to their flexible approach to visitors.
Awasuno Ski Resort

4. Ishikawa's Largest Ski Resort and Other Snow Activities

Hakusan Ichirino Ski Resort ©samhakusan

Hakusan Ichirino Ski Resort is the largest winter resort in Ishikawa Prefecture in terms of skiable space and the number of gondolas and lifts, where visitors can enjoy satisfying runs on diverse courses with abundant snow. Located at the foot of Mt. Hakusan, the resort is easily accessible from JR Kanazawa Station and Komatsu Airport, the main gateways to Ishikawa Prefecture.

The resort has courses suitable for skiers/snowboarders of varying ski levels, from ungroomed courses with steep inclines for advanced riders to wide-open slopes safe for beginners, along with a kids' park where small children can enjoy sledding and tubing. A gondola ride to its 1,050-meter peak station will, in fine weather, give visitors a commanding view of the surrounding area as far as the Sea of Japan.
For those interested in other winter outdoor activities, guided snowshoe nature-observation tours around the resort are offered by the Hakusan Roku Slow Tourism Study Group. Also, about

1.5 kilometers farther into the mountains from the resort, you will find Bunao Mountain Observation Building (Bunaoyama Kansatsusha), a unique facility equipped to allow visitors to observe wildlife in its natural habitat. It is open from mid-November to early May; Japanese macaques, serow, golden eagles and bears are among the various animals that can be observed through telescopes and binoculars from within the facility. Seasonal nature programs sometimes include hikes using traditional Japanese wooden snowshoes known as *kanjiki*, offering visitors a glimpse into winter life in Japan's snow country.

Hakusan Ichirino Onsen ©Ichirino Kogen Hotel Roan (left) and snow-capped Kenrokuen Garden in Kanazawa (right)

Visitors to the ski resort can warm up and relax at the adjacent Ichirino Onsen hot spring area. (*As of Oct. 1, 2026, all hotels in the area use heated tap water for their baths due to a temporary problem with the piping system that supplies hot spring water.) They may also add Kanazawa to their itinerary. About 95 minutes by bus from the ski resort, this vibrant historical city offers a variety of attractions for tourists, ranging from Kenrokuen Garden and traditional districts to its rich craft culture and seasonal cuisine such as the snow crab and winter yellowtail. In winter, traditional "yukitsuri" rope cones covering Kenrokuen's pine trees to protect the branches from snow enhance the serene beauty of the snow-capped garden landscape.
Hakusan Ichirino Ski Resort
SAM Hakusan (Hakusan Ichirino Onsen Ski Resort)
Hakusan Roku Slow Tourism Study Group

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