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our original activities
or to order a tailor-made plan.

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Yamaura Adventures

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Yamaura Adventures

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Yamaura Adventures – For 10,000 years, one with the Mountains –



Chino Tabi

What is Yamaura?

Yamaura means “in the mountain’s shadow”. It describes the unique environment of the rural villages in Chino as they stand right under the peaks of the Yatsugatake Mountains, at an elevation of 1,000 ~1,200m.

About us

We believe that there is more to travel than just sightseeing. This is why at Chino Tabi we make it our mission to design special journeys where, instead of hastily passing by a location, you have the chance to immerse yourself into local life. Our original activities and tailor-made tours connect you, the travelers, and the locals.

For 10,000 years the locals have lived under the shadow of the Yatsugatake Mountains, in harmony with nature and attuned to all the seasons, even the coldest winters. Our objective is – to still be “one with the Mountains” 100 years from now –.

Chino Tabi Concierge





Nature – A region perched in the foothills of a massive mountain range –

Stretching out from the peaks of the Yatsugatake at 2,899m all the way down to where Suwa valley begins at 700m, the Chino area is rich in natural landscapes. From the stark and awe-inspiring rocky scenery of Mt. Akadake, to the lush mossy conifer forests of the highland and the nostalgic pastoral villages of the rural area, the diverse local environment is a sight to behold.





History – A story that goes back 10,000 years –

People have inhabited the region for almost 10,000 years. Numerous elegant artifacts, which date all the way back to the Jomon period (the Japanese stone-age), have been excavated throughout the area. At Suwa Taisha, one of the oldest sanctuaries in Japan, people even now worship the spirit of nature and perpetuate the mysterious and primeval festival of Onbashira, when huge trees felled and dragged down the mountains by manpower alone are erected around the perimeter of the shrines.



Culture – A life in tune with the land and its seasons –

Like their Jomon ancestors, the locals lead a life in harmony with nature. In spring, they forage wild vegetables in the satoyama. In summer, they gather the cool waters of mountain streams into ancient waterways to grow rice and vegetables. In autumn, they pick mushrooms and nuts at the base of the mountains and pickle food to preserve until the next green season. In winter, they make use of the cold mountain breeze to produce unique food and crafts such as kanten and sharp blades. They are one with the Mountains.

Explore the Highlights

Lake Shirakaba

Highland lake surrounded by birch trees, where you can enjoy aquatic sports such as canoe and SUP.



Kurumayama

A grassland plateau situated at 1925m, Kurumayama offers great hiking routes, a 360° panorama view, and a mountain lift to reach the top with ease.



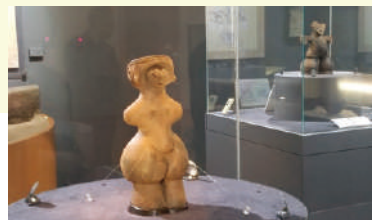
Ski resorts

Chino is no snow country, but the unparalleled high "clear sky ratio" and the breathtaking views from the slopes are sure to attract many a ski fan.



Togari-ishi Jomon Archaeological Museum

Among its various invaluable artifacts, the museum exhibits two of the oldest statuettes in the world: the "Jomon Venus" and the "Masked Goddess." Meeting these 5,000-year-old ladies is surely worth a visit.



Suwa Taisha

One of Japan's oldest sanctuaries, Suwa Taisha is a place of high mysticism where four gigantic pillars called "onbashira" mark the sacred space of the hall of worship.



Town and Rural village area

Rural area (Yamaura)

A nostalgic rural area where you can still find century-old farmhouses and pastoral sceneries untouched by urbanization, the Yamaura is an excellent place to do a home-stay experience or even take a walk.

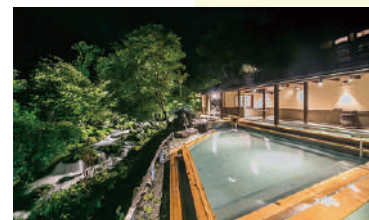


Lake Shirakaba and Kurumayama area

Tateshina area

Onsen

A secret thermal site used by the samurai of old, Tateshina has plenty of day-use hot springs and onsen ryokan.



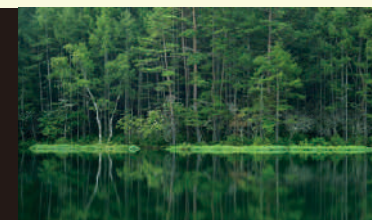
Yokoya Gorge

Lush gorge where a 6km trail coasts a river interwoven with waterfalls, Yokoya Gorge is a must-see in the autumn foliage season.



Mishaka Pond

A growingly popular photo spot, this picturesque pond reflects the surrounding conifer forest like a mirror.



Yatsugatake Mountain area

Moss Forest

This conifer forest, where a fluffy carpet of moss covers everything in sight, looks like it just came out of Hayao Miyazaki's anime world.



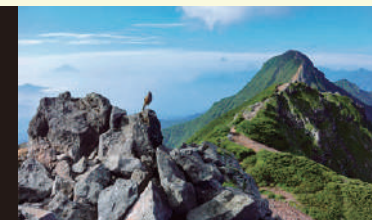
Kita-Yatsugatake Ropeway

This Ropeway takes you up the Yatsugatake Mountains, going from 1771m to 2237m in about seven minutes. From the summit, you can explore Tsubo-Niwa park, a natural garden of igneous rocks, or trek to the nearby peaks.



Trekking

The southern side of the Yatsugatake reaches a height of almost 3,000m and has dozens of challenging trails that will not fail to excite even the more experienced hiker. Let's trek safely!





Chers amis,

How is everything going? As promised, I'm updating you on my *second* journey to the land of the rising sun. The theme this time is art and tradition.

I'm going to visit *edgy* museums and *cutting-edge* architecture. Initially, I was planning to travel *directly* to Matsumoto from Tokyo. Then, I stumbled across an inspiring tour featuring some *quirky* tea houses by an architect named Fujimori Terunobu.

It looked too interesting to pass up, and the Chino city area is on the way to Matsumoto.

Long story short, we are in Chino now and will be staying for one night. After doing some research, I realized two of the world's oldest and most graceful prehistoric statuettes are here. I couldn't possibly give up the chance to *see* them.

Also, the tour organizers suggested that we also join in some local experiences in a traditional rural village off the *beaten* track, which sounded very interesting.

Both my husband and I wanted to get away from the crowd and *see* a more intimate side of Japan, this *detour* seemed the perfect occasion to do just that.

① Heading toward the Yatsugatake Mountains

Our guide picked us up from Chino Station and drove us to the rural village area at about 1,000m of elevation. Terraced rice fields flooded with water paved the way toward the Yatsugatake.



Day 1



② Sasahara, a hamlet stilled in time

Our destination was Sasahara, a tiny village perched on the foothills of the Yatsugatake that looked like it came out some old tale.

③ “Kote-e” street art

The village is not a tourist spot, so we had a local grandpa show us around to better enjoy the local charm. We explored hidden shrines dedicated to the god of the mountain, traditional houses, and well-kept gardens. The most unexpected discovery for us was the popular art of kote-e, relief paintings made of shikkui plaster. Here, dragons, turtles, deities, dozens of different subjects decorate the walls of farmers' warehouses. They are this region's own rural “street art”.

This kote-e of kittens was on the warehouse of a household with many real cats.



We were even invited inside a villager's century-old farmhouse.



④ Foraging for wild vegetables

In spring, the villagers often go into the satoyama in search of food. As part of our culinary experience, we followed a local through the unplowed fields and woods bordering the village to look for seasonal herbs such as fukinoto, seri, and koshi-abura.

Look at how many wild veggies we found!



5 Cooking with the village grannies

Later on, we visited a cute grannie who introduced us to local cuisine. We gathered some herbs and made crispy tempura. Then, we prepared rustic mochi served with a flavorful and thick perilla sauce and some dainty, colorful agar cakes!

This time we went for milk and strawberry, but you can make agar cakes with literally any kind of ingredient.

**6 A quiet evening at a Japanese inn**

We spent the night at a sleek ryokan not far from the village. The interiors were traditional but fresh and comfortable. We enjoyed using the two large and private thermal baths, and dinner was pleasing both to the palate and the eye.

**Day 2****7 A visit to the Jomon museum**

After checking out, we headed for a museum of Japanese prehistoric art to see two of the world's most antique statuettes. I was genuinely impressed with the elegance of some artifacts on display. They are thousands of years old but as stunning as ever.



The voluptuous figures of the Jomon Venus and Masked Goddess.

**8 Bike rental at Chino Station**

Back at the station, we decided to rent two electric bikes so that we could move around with ease.

**9 Cycling under the cherry blossoms**

Our little trip to Chino happened to be exactly in the middle of the cherry blossom season. We didn't expect to see any sakura in full bloom so late in April, so it was a welcome surprise when we gazed upon a multitude of pink flowers on the way to the ancient shrine of Suwa Taisha.

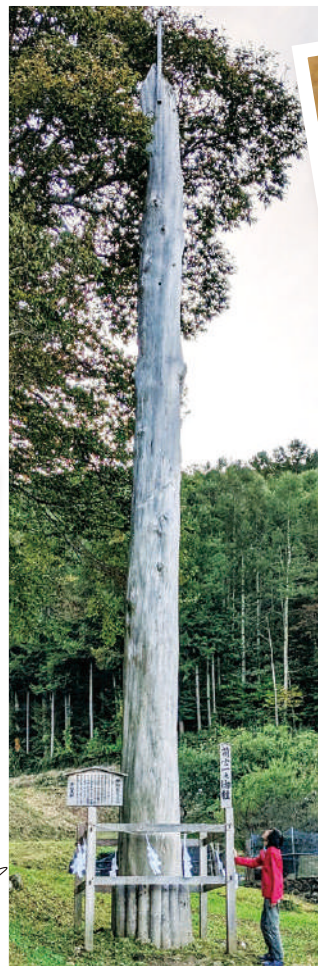


10 An exclusive tour of Suwa Taisha and Fujimori Terunobu's quirky architecture

In the afternoon, we joined a private tour to visit some unique tea houses by the up-and-coming architect Fujimori Terunobu. The program started at Suwa Taisha, where Nature worship still has a central role in the community's spiritual life. Every key point inside the sanctuary was marked by magnificent centenarian trees, and ablutions were performed at a mountain stream.



Four huge pillars called onbashira mark the site of the hall of worship.



The exhibition at the entrance of the Jinchokan Museum took me by surprise. It has such a primeval feeling to it.

To the tea houses!

My inner child got excited at the sight of such fantastical architecture. First, we went into the flying mud house, a blowfish-like tea house that is suspended in midair. After that, we climbed up to the too-high tea house and had a casual tea ceremony at the too-low tea house, the one that looks like a modern Jomon pit dwelling.

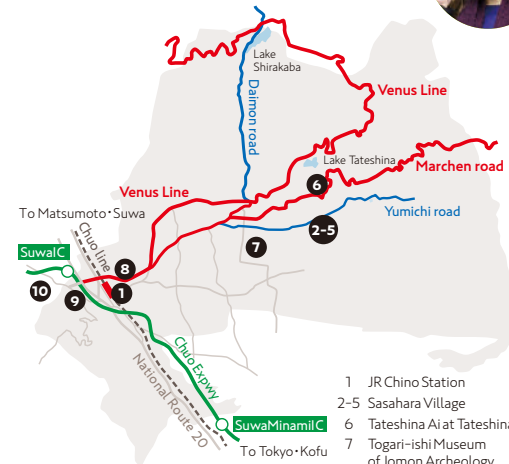


11 And back again

These past two days were full of adventures. I am so glad we made this small detour.

About this tailor - made tour

The participants were a French couple in their 40s who came to Chino to take part in Fujimori Terunobu's tea house tour. They were particularly interested in art and design but also wanted to see a bit of rural Japan. We suggested some authentic satoyama experiences in a small village, also famous for artistic plaster craft. And to complement their architecture tour, we added a visit to the local Jomon prehistoric art museum.



Itinerary



Hi there,

How are things? I'm on a family trip with Jane and the kids.

This year we went all out and flew to Japan.

We rent a car and are now traveling through the country.

While doing the classic Tokyo and Kyoto, we also want to enjoy the countryside,
see nature and hike a little.

Which is why we spent one night in Chino, an off-the-beaten-track mountain area
on the way between Karuizawa and Mt.Fuji.

We first found out about Chino when we stumbled upon an article
about a mossy forest in the region that looks a lot like Yakushima.

Jane, of course, wanted to check it out,

so I started browsing through travel websites to *see what else we could do in the area.*

Turns out Chino has a lot to offer.

Day 1

① Driving up the mountain

We left Karuizawa in the morning and headed to the Moss Forest, on top of the Yatsugatake Mountain Range.

This is a picture of moss taken through a loupe

② The Moss Forest

The Moss Forest was indeed a magical piece of wood. The entire ground was covered in a thick layer of moss, which also grew on rocks and gnarly roots of trees.



The forest reminded me of that anime by Hayao Miyazaki.

③ Exploring the forest with a guide

To make the best of our time there, we joined a tour. The guide showed us lots of small and hidden wonders, which we would have certainly passed by without noticing if we had been on our own. But nothing beats the kids' excitement. They were each given a loupe to observe the moss, and looked like little explorers, meticulously checking every centimeter of moss. Toward the end of the tour, we also had a "mini" photoshoot in the moss with a bunch of toy figurines.



④ Savory lunch at an old farmhouse

Afterward, we stopped for lunch at a farmhouse café in the foothills of the Yatsugatake. The century-old building had a nostalgic beauty and the traditional local dishes were mouth-watering.

Such a colorful and dainty meal



The master is also a farmer, and all the ingredients were homegrown.



⑤ Fun with soba noodles and stay at a local minshuku

With our bellies full, we drove to Lake Shirakaba – a mountain resort at 4600ft. There, on the lakeshore, was Minshuku Asahigaoka, where we joined a private soba experience and stayed for the night. The kids had the time of their life, intently kneading the soba dough and cutting the noodles. But if possible, Jane and I enjoyed ourselves even more. I felt so grateful that the master shared his in-depth knowledge about soba with us. Oh, and the food was amazing.



Day 2

⑥ Morning canoe ride

After breakfast, we walked down to the canoe school.
As it was the first time for both kids, we joined a short lesson.
The kids insisted on riding on their own,
and in less than 2h, they were boldly canoeing through the lake.
They almost outrun us.



The lake was
really livened up
by all the brightly
colored canoes

View from
the top

⑦ Mountain lift ride to a
360°panoramic view

Just a short drive from the lake was Mt. Kurumayama where
a lift takes you to 6,315ft. From the summit,
we had a breath-taking view of the three ranges of the Alps,
Mt.Fuji and the Yatsugatake.



⑧ A carpet of daylilies

Before leaving, we got off at the halfway station
to observe the daylilies (Nikko-kisuge).
The green slopes sprinkled with yellow were so pretty that we spent a
good part of the morning walking up and down the path taking pictures.

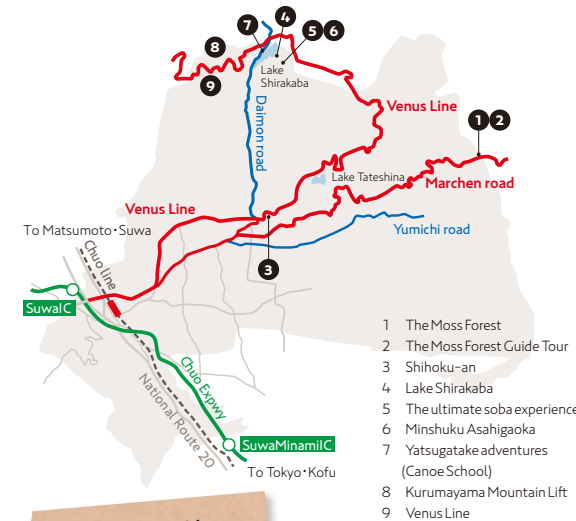


⑨ Scenic drive above the clouds

Instead of going straight for the highway,
we set out along the scenic route Venus Line.
I must say I'm happy we did.
Mile after mile, we enjoyed an unobstructed view of
the Alps and the valley beneath.

About this tailor - made tour

We planned this tour for a family from the USA,
who traveled with two small children.
They wanted to enjoy natural landscapes,
do some hands-on activities, and most of all,
make sure their kids had fun.
Since they wanted to be active,
we had them stay in Lake Shirakaba,
a mountain resort with plenty of outdoor activities
such as canoeing and horse-back riding.



Itinerary



Yamaura
Adventures

Autumn

Make your own knife experience at century-old smithy "Sadamasa"

Hi there!

How's it going? I'm on a trip with Jack and you probably can guess where.

I know, Japan again... but hey, there's just so much stuff to do.

This time the purpose of the trip was to walk the Nakasendo Road in Kiso, but Jack found out about a unique experience to make your own Japanese knife in Nagano, so we had to stop by on our way back.

You know how Jack is obsessed with Japanese blades and, to tell you the truth, the activity looked intriguing to me too. It's in a place called Chino, something like 30 min from Matsumoto (the city with the castle) and not far from Kiso. The location is stunning, perched on the foothills of this massive mountain range called Yatsugatake and totally immersed in nature.

Since we had to stay two days for the knife experience anyway, we looked for more things to do and, somehow, we ended up staying one extra night. It's been an adventure!

① JR Chino Station

Just got to Chino Station from Kiso.
The smithy is just a 15-min walk away
from here.

Day 1

② Becoming blacksmiths for 2 days

They promised an authentic experience and they delivered.
The smithy itself was memorable,
with its soot-caked walls and well-used machinery,
and the smith was so welcoming.

The first day we mainly worked at the forge shaping the metal into
a knife. We got to see the smith at work (such precision and speed!)
and actively took part in the process hammering, cutting and fixing
the knife with our own hands.



③ An unforgettable home-stay at a farmer's house

In the afternoon we moved up the mountain to an idyllic rural area for our farmstay experience. Our hosts for the day, the Hiruma family - a young couple with two small kids- picked us up and drove us to their place, a big 100-year-old traditional farmhouse. We got to try many activities such as harvesting rice and making dry persimmons. We also prepared dinner together using home-made miso paste and home-grown vegetables we picked ourselves.



Our eco-friendly dinner:
miso soup with tofu,
pickles, okowa rice and
pumpkin.



Staying with them felt so natural, like visiting a friend
you haven't seen in a while. I have to confess; I cried a
little when we said goodbye the following morning.

In Japan they call it
"persimmon curtain"
and now I can see why.



We used four different
whetstones
to sharpen the blade!



4 Our own Japanese knife!

After breakfast, our host took us to the smithy and we picked up where we left off. The second day was all about putting a cutting edge to the blade and making it sharp. It was so emotional to see as the core of steel slowly surfaced from its iron shell under the smith's skillful hands.



Our tour guide, Paul from
Yatsugatake Cycling.
Such a passionate cyclist!



5 Cycling on the foothills of the Yatsugatake

I couldn't resist the prospect of a cycling tour in such a scenic place. We pedaled through picturesque farming villages, quiet woods and terraced fields with an unobstructed view of the three ranges of the Alps.



Nothing says autumn
in rural Japan like
rice fields after the
harvest

6 Stay at a traditional onsen ryokan

Further up the mountain, around 1500m, there's an onsen retreat area called Tateshina. That's where we spent the last night, in a Japanese inn tucked away deep in the woods.

Legend has it that a famous samurai used to bathe in the smooth milky waters which flow at Tatsunokan to heal his wounds after a fight.



7 A photogenic pond

There's no way we could leave without checking out the autumn foliage, so on our last day we planned a hike to the nearby Lake Tateshina passing through Yokoya Gorge. The first spot on the way was Mishaka Pond, a water mirror which reflects the surrounding landscape.



A pic of Otaki falls taken from the observation spot



8 Hiking amid a whirlwind of colors

Walking through Yokoya Gorge was like entering an impressionist painting. The entire forest was colored with brush strokes of vibrant reds, yellows and greens.



9 Lunch with lake view

After two hours and eight km we reached our goal, Lake Tateshina. For lunch we had a hearty helping of soba noodles (the local specialty) while enjoying the view of the lakeshore lined up with momiji.

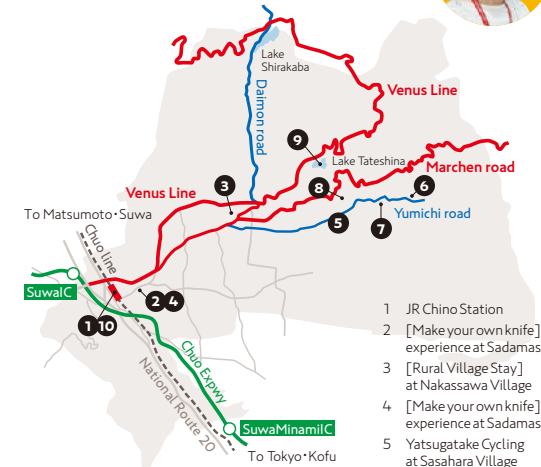


10 Back to Chino Station

A local bus took us to the station, our last stop for this trip. It's been an adventure!

About this tailor - made tour

A couple from Australia in their late 20s wanted to join our experience to make a Japanese knife. They like to be active, so we also suggested some outdoor activities to enjoy autumn in the yamaura such as a cycling tour across the countryside and a short hike in the highland to view the autumn foliage. As we wanted them to taste some local food and experience the harvest season in rural Japan, we also threw in a farmstay.



- 1 JR Chino Station
- 2 [Make your own knife] experience at Sadamasu
- 3 [Rural Village Stay] at Nakassawa Village
- 4 [Make your own knife] experience at Sadamasu
- 5 Yatsugatake Cycling at Sasahara Village
- 6 Shibuno Yu Tatsunokan at Oku Tateshina
- 7 Mishaka Pond
- 8 Yokoya Gorge
- 9 Lake Tateshina
- 10 JR Chino Station

Itinerary



Sake tour at renowned brewery "Masumi"

Hello. You good?

It's too bad you couldn't join us this year. You missed out on quite a lot of fun. Don't worry, though. As I'm a good friend, I'm gonna give you a detailed account of the whole trip.

As you know, this year we went snowboarding in Hakuba. At first, we intended to stay there the whole time, but, as the girls insisted on doing something outside the ski resorts, we all agreed to change the plan for the last three days.

Someone pitched the idea of visiting a sake brewery, and as you can imagine, the consensus was unanimous. We found an exciting tour in an area called Suwa, on the way back to Tokyo. The company organizing it offered other intriguing winter activities in the vicinity and we picked a few.

① Train ride to Chino

From Hakuba, we changed trains at Nagano station and arrived in Chino in about 2 hours and a half.

② Toward the Yatsugatake Mountains

Our guide met us at the station and took us to our first activity. As we got closer to the rural area, we were met by a spectacular view of the snow-capped Yatsugatake Mountains.

**④ In search of icefalls**

In the afternoon, we put on light crampons and hiked through a glacial gorge in search of icefalls. The landscape was otherworldly, with long cascades of glimmering ice coating the steep rock walls.



We had frozen tofu stew, okara salad and soy milk agar cake.



Peggy took some great pics.

**⑥ Ropeway ride to the top of the mountain**

After breakfast, we got to Kita-Yatsugatake Ropeway, the starting point of our snow hike.

The contrast of the red ropeway against the snowy mountain was so eye-catching it demanded a picture.

**③ Visit to a frozen tofu producer**

You're probably wondering what's frozen tofu- I know I was. As the name suggests, it's a preserved food made by laying slices of tofu outside to freeze.

We visited a family-run shop, where we observed the master at work and even tried tofu making with our own hands. Being able to talk to the producer was a matchless experience.

**⑤ Cozy pension up in the mountain**

The first night, we stayed in a pension -a family-run western-style lodging where they serve delicious homemade meals. The girls loved the cute retro interiors and I really enjoyed the fragrant bread and savory bacon served at breakfast.



7 Snowshoe hike through a winter mountain

I always thought hiking a winter mountain was out of my reach, so I was pretty excited for this tour. The trail was easy to walk and the scenery once we got to the peak was breath-taking. Our guide, Roddy, taught us how to read the snow and showed us some fascinating natural phenomena such as frozen trees, riming and sastrugi.



We were blessed with great weather and could see all the way from the Southern to the Northern Alps.



8 Shake off the cold at a local onsen bath

After our little adventure in the frosty mountain environment, we craved the warmth of hot springs. Luckily for us, the bus bound for the station passed through Tateshina, a famous onsen destination. We soaked in a large bath with a great view of the Alps.

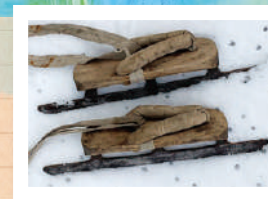


We also helped the locals do minor repairs to the rink.



9 Fun night at a schoolyard ice skate rink

You might have realized by now, but this area is seriously cold! Which gave the locals the idea of flooding their schoolyards in winter to make handmade skate rinks. At night, we visited one and tried skating. The locals taught us patiently and, by the end, we were fairly good at it.



These are geta skates. Here, people used to wear them when skating!

10 A few drinks before bed

As the road to the hotel was lined with several small izakaya, we decided to stop by a couple for a few drinks and a light meal.



They had an excellent selection of local sake labels.

Day 3



12 "Masumi" sake brewery tour

The guide took us to the heart of the brewery, where all the action takes place. We got to observe every stage of production from the rice steaming to the sake filtering. We were lucky enough to see the moment they poured the yeast into the starter. It was very theatrical. The visit ended with a tasting. We had fragrant and dry sake, a fruit-flavored liqueur and sweet amazake.

11 Suwa area, one of Japan's top sake destinations

There are nine sake breweries in the region, most of which have been in business for more than three centuries. The one we visited, Masumi, is among the oldest.



13 And back to Tokyo

A little tipsy from the tasting, we boarded the train to Tokyo.

About this tailor-made tour

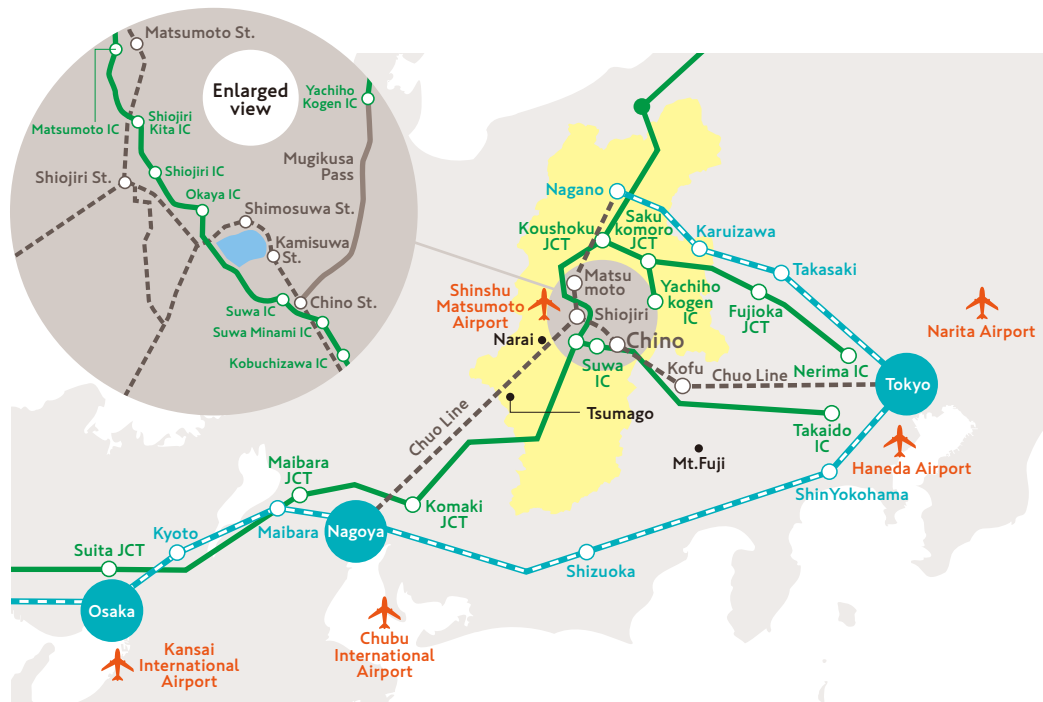
We made this plan for a group of friends in their 30s from Singapore. They were looking for something to do after their ski trip to Hakuba.

We proposed some adventurous activities to enjoy a few highlights of the winter season, such as a snowshoe hike on top of the Yatsugatake Mountains, a visit to a frozen tofu producer and a schoolyard ski rink.

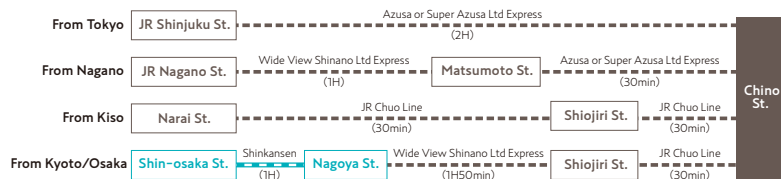


Itinerary

ACCESS MAP



By train



By car

