

# akita

Japan



Akita Shirakami area

Experience the magic of northern Japan's

## Akita Shirakami Area





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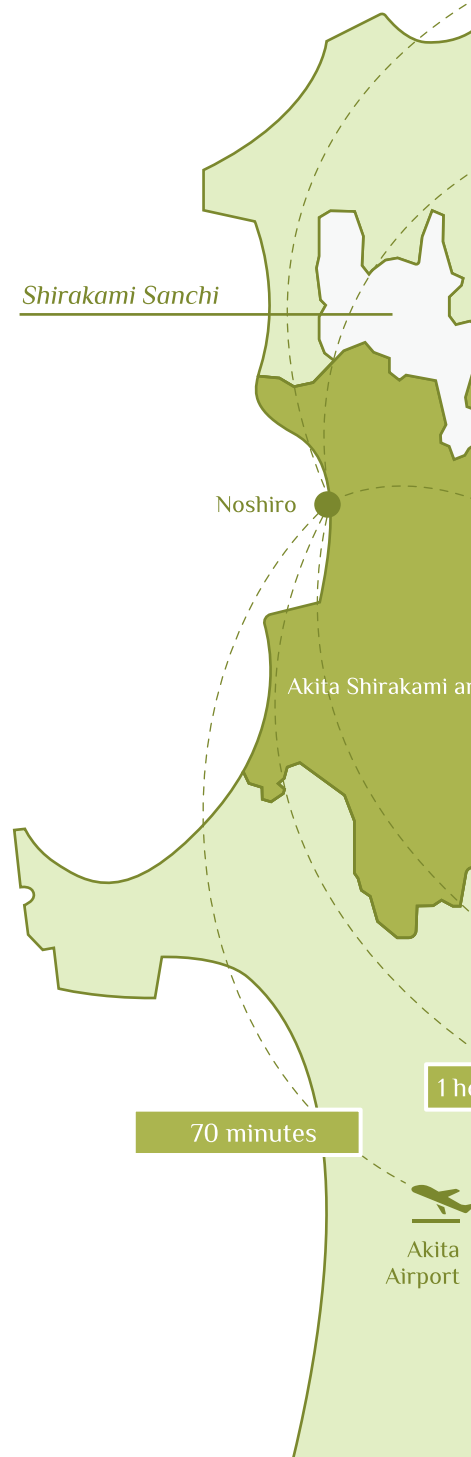
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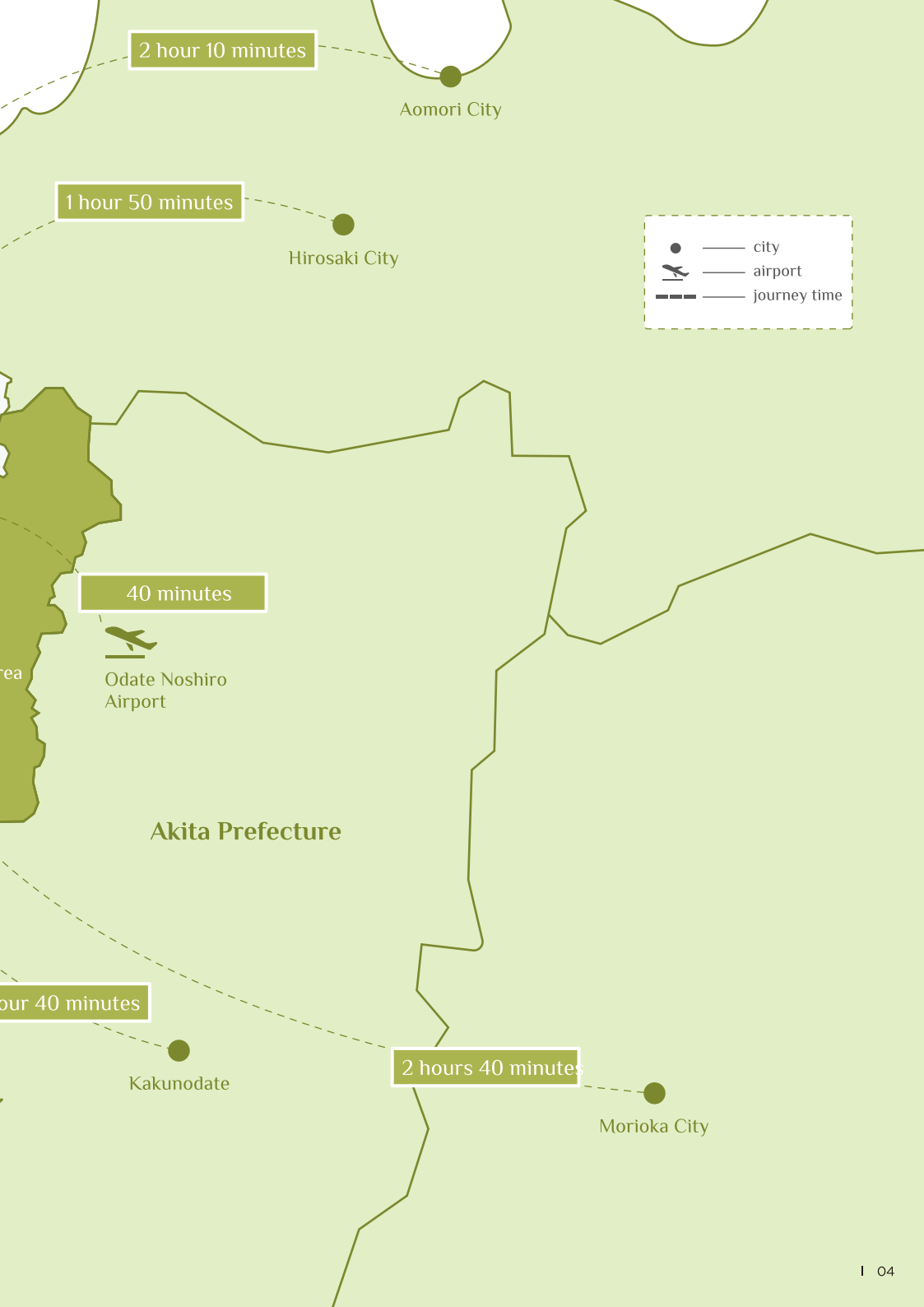
## The Akita Shirakami Area

Spanning from the northwest of Akita Prefecture to the southwest of Aomori Prefecture, Shirakami Sanchi is an 8,000-year-old cold-temperate beech forest that has been mostly left untouched by humans. Designated as one of Japan's first UNESCO World Natural Heritage sites, Shirakami Sanchi contains the largest remaining virgin beech forest in east Asia.

The beech tree is known as *buna* in Japanese, which literally means “useless tree”. The reason for this name is due to the wood's susceptibility to decay and deformation, and that it doesn't make for good firewood. However, because of its insignificance to humans, the forests of Shirakami Sanchi were spared from being exploited and logged. It has since been discovered that this tree, which grows only five centimetres a year, has an amazing effect on soil and water conservation.

The Shirakami area that lies within Akita Prefecture includes Noshiro City and the surrounding towns of Fujisato, Mitane, and Happo. Throughout history, the people here have benefitted from the bounty that the forests of Shirakami Sanchi provide. Its pristine waters have nourished the area's agricultural and sake production for centuries. Meaning “white god” in English, Shirakami Sanchi bears a god-like aura to locals that is reflected in the area's traditional events, customs, and *matagi* hunting culture.





2 hour 10 minutes

Aomori City

1 hour 50 minutes

Hirosaki City

● — city  
✈ — airport  
- - - journey time

40 minutes



Odate Noshiro Airport

Akita Prefecture

our 40 minutes

Kakunodate

2 hours 40 minutes

Morioka City



Akita Shirakami Area

*Suggested Road Trip Itinerary*





Namahage Museum

Namahage are demon-like gods. Every year on New Year's Eve (based on the old lunar calendar), Namahage descend Mount Shinzan to visit the homes of locals and denounce misbehaviour and laziness. Families serve the Namahage food and sake in return for their blessing. At the Namahage Museum, visitors can learn about the history and variety of Namahage in Akita Prefecture as well as try on the traditional Namahage attire, traditional straw coat and all. In addition, you can see a live Namahage performance next door at the Oga Shinzan Folklore Museum. Set inside a converted traditional house typical of Akita's Oga region, the performance gives a realistic look into this longstanding New Year's Eve ritual.



Shinzan Shrine

Sitting in a forest on the summit of a mountain with the same name, Shinzan Shrine has flourished as a place of worship for monks in the Tohoku area since ancient times. These days, the shrine is most famous for the Namahage Sedo Festival which is held in February each year. During this festival, the Namahage are appeased with rice cakes that have been roasted over a bonfire. These rice cakes are given to the audience as well.



Cape Nyudo

Rated as one of Japan's top sunset locations, Cape Nyudo offers panoramic views of the Sea of Japan. The rugged cliffs that protrude into the ocean create a landscape that's reminiscent of the Jurassic Park movies. Not only is it a great place for photos, you can also enjoy fresh seafood bowls at the restaurants across the street.



Abe Farm Junsai Picking



Junsai Dish

*Junsai*, known commonly as “watershield” in English, is a perennial aquatic plant that has been a part of Japanese cuisine since at least the eighth century, when it was mentioned in the *Manyōshū*, one of the earliest collections of Japanese poetry. Today, Mitane is the largest producer of junsai in Japan. Junsai grows in shallow ponds and requires clean water in order to thrive, making the Akita Shirakami area the perfect environment for growing junsai. The plant is hand-picked by harvesters on small specialised wooden boats between May and August. Visitors to Akita during these months can join in on the harvest by booking a junsai-picking experience.

| Contact Mitane Town Tourist Association for more info. |



Izakaya Sakedoko Berabo

With many authentic Akita-style dishes available, this *izakaya* (Japanese-style pub) is popular with both locals and visitors. The dishes on offer include local ingredients like *hinai* chicken, junsai, and *kiritanpo* (pounded rice sticks). Berabo also has a great range of locally made sake. With an abundance of naturally filtered spring water from Shirakami Sanchi, Akita has a long history of producing top quality sake.





### Meet Akita Dogs

Noshiro Kojuso, tucked away in Akita's countryside, is where Akita dogs of all ages, sizes and colours are raised. One of Japan's most iconic dog breeds, the Akita was originally a hunting dog. These days, its cute appearance has made the breed so popular around the world that it has even been listed as a national natural treasure in Japan. Junichi Motose, one of the few veteran Akita breeders in Japan today, takes care of his dogs at Noshiro Kojuso. Accompanied by Mr. Motose, you can walk and play with an Akita! The fastest way to get to know Akita dogs is to interact with them. Mr. Motose says he hopes to increase awareness of, and interest in, Akita dogs through his interactive experience program, which he began in November 2019. | Head to [visitshirakami.com](http://visitshirakami.com) for more info. |



### Tenyo Liquor Store

One of the oldest liquor stores in Noshiro, Tenyo is a family-run business with a history that dates back to 1917. Specialising in local sake, most of Tenyo's stock is made in Akita Prefecture by small, high-quality sake breweries. A sake connoisseur's dream, Tenyo has something for all taste preferences! Located within walking distance of Noshiro's nightlife district Yanagimachi, you can stop by before a night out on the town.



Former Ryotei Kaneyu

Kaneyu first opened as a high-end traditional Japanese restaurant (*ryotei*) in 1937. Surrounded by a beautiful Japanese garden, the building was constructed and decorated using locally sourced cedar trees. Kaneyu is regarded as a symbol of Noshiro, and has been listed as a Registered Tangible Cultural Property. At Kaneyu you can try on a simple kimono for only 500 yen/hour, go on a guided tour of the facility, and have a cup of coffee or tea in the cafe area. If you make a reservation in advance, you can also enjoy a lunch or dinner here. Kaneyu also sells a variety of local souvenirs.

| Head to [visitshirakami.com](http://visitshirakami.com) for more info. |



Shirakami Sanchi World Heritage Conservation Center Fujisato-kan

Located at the southern foothills of Shirakami Sanchi, the Shirakami Sanchi World Heritage Conservation Center Fujisato-kan introduces the history and ecology of this mostly untouched wilderness area. The museum's nature guides can give you information about various hiking trails in the area. As a gateway to Shirakami Sanchi, this facility plays an important role in spreading the message of environmental protection and safe hiking practices to visitors.



Dakedai Forest

Shirakami Sanchi is a vast expanse of pristine forested mountains and valleys that can be quite difficult for the general public to gain access to. The far more accessible Dakedai Forest has a primitive ecological system similar to that of Shirakami Sanchi's protected "core zone", and its hiking trail is relatively flat with 1.8-km of well-designed wooden walkways that take about an hour to walk. Along the trail, you will come across a rare beech tree that is over 400 years old.





Mt. Fujisato Komagatake

One of the tallest peaks on the Akita side of Shirakami Sanchi, Mt. Fujisato Komagatake (1,158 m) is a fun hike if you're really looking to work your muscles. About an hour's drive from Fujisato-kan, the hiking course will take you through Tanashiro Marsh – which transforms into a field of alpine flowers in spring – Shirakami Sanchi's representative beech forests, and an expansive view of the protected "core zone". A round-trip of this hike takes close to four hours.



Kimimachizaka Park

Cherry blossoms in the spring, Japanese maples in the fall, dramatic cliff faces, and even a river, this scenic park has everything a nature lover could ask for! Kimimachizaka Park is also popular as a date spot thanks to its romantic history. As Emperor Meiji travelled through Japan's northern region in 1881, his wife sent a love letter to this park to be presented to him upon his arrival. Later, the emperor named the area kimimachi, which can be translated as "wait for you". Visitors to this park often go to Koibumi Shrine to pray for love and romance, and ring the bell of eternal love. The park features a small cafe, picnic tables, and a few short walking trails.



Canoe Experience on the Yoneshiro River

Canoeing on the Yoneshiro River is one of the best ways to enjoy the beauty of the Akita Shirakami area! There are two 90-minute sessions a day: a morning course and an afternoon course. Booking this canoe experience requires a minimum of 2 participants. There is also a shorter canoe course available called Petit Canoe that runs for about 45 minutes. As long as you get to the Futatsui Town Tourist Association one hour before the tour starts, you can sign up for the Petit Canoe experience on the day!

| Head to [visitshirakami.com](http://visitshirakami.com) for more info. |

Akita Shirakami Area

*One-day Rail & Bus Trip*



**Resort Shirakami Scenic Train**

The most convenient way to get to Shirakami Sanchi's Juniko Lakes is to take the Resort Shirakami scenic train on the Gono Line. Running through mountains and alongside the Sea of Japan, this train slows down when passing scenic spots to allow passengers an opportunity to take in the view and snap a few photos. The carriages are designed with large viewing windows and details that reflect the area's landscape. Private booth seating is also available on all trains. You can use JR Rail Passes to ride the Resort Shirakami train.

## Day Trip



Juniko Lakes

Juniko actually means “12 lakes” but is a collective name for the 33 lakes scattered throughout an area in the northwest of Shirakami Sanchi. Aoike is especially famous for its magical blue colouring and incredible clarity. Although Aoike is about 9 metres deep, you can clearly see the fallen tree branches that lay beneath its waters. The sapphire blue hue of the lake changes slightly depending on the angle that sunlight hits the water, meaning that both time of day and season will have an effect on the colour you see. Generally, mornings are recommended for the best view. Just a 15-minute walk from Aoike is another blue pond called Wakitsubo no Ike. The trail around both ponds can be walked in about 45 minutes, and finishes at Juniko-an, a small tea house where you can enjoy traditional matcha (green tea) made with the fresh spring water from Wakitsubo no Ike.



Hatahatakan Kan

Located en route to Juniko Lakes, Hatahata Kan is an onsen (hot spring) facility with lodging and dining options available. Situated across from Akita Shirakami Station, it is a great pit stop for those travelling on the Resort Shirakami scenic train. Enjoy their ocean-view baths, one of which resembles a *hatahata* (Japanese sandfish) fishing boat – Akita’s designated prefectural fish. You don’t need to be an overnight guest to use the onsen facilities at Hatahata Kan.

# Festivals

## Akita Shirakami Area

Each season the Tohoku region brings with it vibrant colourful festivals, each reflecting and preserving the unique local history and traditional culture.

Late April to early May



Hirosaki Cherry Blossom Festival | Hirosaki, Aomori

Cherry Blossoms in the Tohoku region bloom almost one month later than those in the Kanto area due to the region's higher latitude. Cherry blossoms season in the north runs from late April to early May.

Aug 3~4



Tenku no Fuyajo Festival | Noshiro, Akita

The Tenku no Fuyajo Festival occurs during the Tanabata festival season in summer. It features Japan's tallest castle-shaped lantern floats, which are paraded through the streets of Noshiro to the sound of taiko drums and traditional flutes. The tallest float reaches over 24 metres!

Second weekend of February



Namahage Sedo Festival | Oga, Akita

An envoy of demon-like gods called Namahage descend from the mountains wearing threatening masks and straw robes. The Namahage perform dances to pray for good harvests, and for protection from disease and disasters.

Last weekend of July



Mitane Sand Craft Festival | Mitane, Akita

This fun summer event showcases the works of professional sand sculptors from across Japan and the world. Apart from the funky sand sculptures, you can also enjoy live performances, festival food, and fireworks on the beach!

Aug 3~6



Akita Kanto Festival | Akita, Akita

Bamboo poles reaching up to 12 metres tall and carrying up to 46 paper lanterns are paraded through the streets of Akita City. Performers don't just carry these heavy bamboo poles, they also use their body to balance them.

# Souvenirs & Gifts

Souvenirs and gift ideas to remember your trip to northern Akita

## Akita Cedar Oil



| Hiramaya Hakari-ten |  
9-16 Kanmachi, Noshiro, Akita

Bring the healing scent of the forest home with this oil made from Akita cedar.

## Berabo Kites



| Kitaman Shop |  
7-3 Hiyoshimachi, Noshiro, Akita

Berabo kites are unique to the Akita Shirakami area. The design is believed to ward off evil spirits. Kitaman Shop is now the last berabo maker in the area.

## Shirakami Sanchi Goods



| Mori no Eki |  
38-2 Satoguri, Fujikoto, Fujisato, Yamamoto-gun, Akita

You can't visit World Heritage listed Shirakami Sanchi and not get one of these! Mori no Eki carries a variety of handmade products made by local artisans too.

## Local Akita Sake



| Tenyo Liquor Store |  
8-16 Omachi, Noshiro, Akita

Tenyo carries a wide variety of locally produced Akita sake including those from Kikusui Brewery and Yamamoto Brewery, both Shirakami area favourites.

## An-donut



| A-1 Bakery |  
7-4 Kammachi, Noshiro, Akita

A-1 Bakery's an-donut is popular among locals. It's a small doughnut filled with azuki (red bean) paste, fried and powdered with sugar. The bakery is over 80 years old.

## Akita Dog Souvenirs



| Fujicho |  
1-5 Omachi, Noshiro, Akita

The Akita dog is symbolic of Akita Prefecture and people of all ages will enjoy these cute souvenirs.



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