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[SHIRAKAWA-GO] 白川郷

The A to Z of Gassho-zukuri Houses

It is said that the *gassho-zukuri* thatched roof architectural style originated in the early Edo period (1603 ~ 1868), when there was extremely high demand for silk and therefore for silkworm breeding. The move towards installing shelves in the attic, where the silkworms would be cultured, can be thought of as the starting point of the *gassho-zukuri* tradition. In order to create an environment suitable to nurturing silkworms, the attic needed to be made into a wide, spacious area with plenty of light entering from outside as well as good ventilation. The result is the grand attic that you will see when you make your way to Shirakawa-go! The following are some other distinguishing characteristics of these unique houses that dot the landscape of Ogimachi:

All of the thatched roof houses in the village face the same direction

The roofs themselves always face east and west so that, during the winter when they are buried under heavy snow, they get as much sunlight as possible, causing the snow to melt more quickly. Additionally, the attic windows always face north and south so that wind is able to pass through the house, allowing for the best ventilation possible.

The roofs are inclined at a steep 60-degree angle

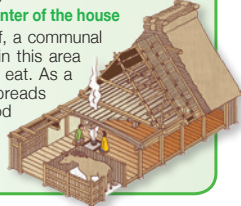
Because of the amount of snowfall in the region, the roofs are set at such steep inclines in order to lessen the pressure exerted by the snow. The steeper angle causes snow to slide off the rooftops more easily, enabling the roofs to last through the harsh winters with less wear and tear. They used to be re-thatched only once every 30 ~ 40 years, so they needed to last for that length of time.

There are no nails and almost no metal used in their construction

Instead, natural materials such as straw-braided rope and *neso*, a term used for softened tree branches, are used for tying everything together. Strong against the weight of snow, these natural fibers also give far more easily than do nails, adding a degree of flexibility to the roofs that other kinds lack. As a result, the roof and the house as a whole are able to sway slightly with strong winds, earthquakes, and the like, making them extremely resistant and durable.

An *irori*, a sunken hearth in the floor, is generally placed in the center of the house

Because the entire extended family used to live under one roof, a communal sitting area was often built in the heart of the 1st floor, and in this area would be a hearth around which the family would gather and eat. As a side effect, the smoke produced from the hearth rises and spreads throughout the house, turning the wood black. This is a good thing, however, as this smoke makes the wood more supple and pest-resistant and strengthens the straw rope knots keeping the house together!



1 Wada House 和田家



The only *gassho-zukuri* house in Shirakawa-go that has been designated an Important Cultural Property by the Japanese government, the Wada House is also among the oldest and largest in town. Built over 300 years ago, this grand house has been passed down generation after generation through the Wada family. In the past, the village leaders/checkpoint officials who oversaw traffic through the region used to come from this family line and therefore lived in this house, imbuing it with a sense of historical importance to add to its already significant physical grandeur. The house is large enough that, while the greater part of it is used as a museum, the remaining portion serves as the home for this generation's Wada family. As with other thatched roof houses in the village, the Wada House was also a place where gunpowder was made and silkworms were cultured. In fact, you can actually see the process of silkworm breeding in person, as they still culture real silkworms in the Wada House during the summer. In the museum, you can look at old tableware, tools used for silkworm breeding, and other artifacts that have been passed down through the generations. 997 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun 9 am ~ 5 pm ¥300 (Elementary school students: ¥150) "Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [3-minute walk] 05769-6-1058



2 Shirakawa-go Winter Illumination 白川郷ライトアップ



Perhaps one of the most well-known events in Gifu Prefecture is the illumination of Shirakawa-go that takes place during seven select days in January and February every year (the dates change, so please consult the below link or other websites for more details). Of course, during this winter period, the town of Ogimachi is covered with a thick blanket of snow, which makes the area glisten under the illuminating lights. The image of the magnificent thatched roofs covered with snow above the dimly lit windows of the houses is one of the prizes of Gifu, and an incredible number of visitors make their way here to see this very sight! Note that there is no public transportation available out of Shirakawa-go after the illumination start time, so be sure to either book accommodations in or nearby the village or reserve a taxi to take you back to Takayama or elsewhere. 9 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun 05769-6-1013 (Shirakawa-go Tourist Association) <http://lightup.asia/?lang=en>



3 Shiroyama Viewpoint 城山天守閣展望台



While the thatched roof houses of Shirakawa-go are of course magnificent up close, taking a step back and taking in the whole picture reveals yet another level to the idyllic beauty of the village. The Shiroyama Viewpoint is located on a hill overlooking Ogimachi and is the place to go for this famous view. A fantastic vantage point for photos, the Viewpoint is also home to the restaurant "Tenshukaku." Soak in the brilliant scenery of Shirakawa-go, which takes on a different flavor every season of the year, at this popular spot. 2269-1 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun "Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [15-minute walk] 05769-6-1728 (Tenshukaku)



4 Jin Homura Museum of Art 焰仁美術館



A famous painter in Japan, Jin Homura has produced one original work of art after another, some of which were created in his workshop here in Shirakawa-go. In addition to the workshop, he also established this museum, where many of his works are displayed. The sight of vividly colored paintings adorning the interior of a *gassho-zukuri* house is quite a rare one, making the Jin Homura Museum of Art a unique, and a uniquely Shirakawa-go, destination. 2483 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun 9 am ~ 4 pm ¥300 (Students of high school age or older: ¥200, Middle and elementary school students: ¥100) Wednesday "Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [15-minute walk] 05769-6-1967 <http://www.hidakayama.ne.jp/j-homura/JPN>



5 Gassho-zukuri Open-Air Museum 野外博物館 合掌造り民家園



Located just across the river from the heart of Ogimachi is this Open-Air Museum, which showcases the traditional way of life that people enjoyed in the past. Featuring 25 *gassho-zukuri* thatched roof houses, some of which have been moved and reassembled here for preservation purposes, the museum is a great place to explore before or after visiting the heart of the village itself. From soba noodles to straw crafts to *ta-ke-tonbo*, a propeller-like toy made of bamboo that flies when you spin it between your palms, you can make all sorts of items that are representative of the old lifestyle of the area (additional fees apply for each hands-on activity). 2499 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun 8:40 am ~ 5 pm (December ~ February: 9 am ~ 4 pm) ¥600 (Primary and secondary school students: ¥400) November (December ~ March: Thursday) "Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [20-minute walk] 05769-6-1231 <http://www.shirakawago-minkaen.jp/english/admin/>



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6 TOYOTA Shirakawa-go Eco-Institute トヨタ白川郷自然学校



In keeping with its theme of "Coexisting with Nature," the TOYOTA Shirakawa-go Eco-Institute offers a variety of programs meant to get its guests to think and learn about nature. As a facility that emphasizes awareness of the environment and the importance that it plays in human society, it is fitting that the institute is located so close to Shirakawa-go, where nature - particularly the harshness of winter - has shaped the culture of the village. You can enjoy hot springs as well as delicious French food. More than just a hotel, the Eco-Institute brings you closer to the Japanese countryside and encourages you to look at the natural world from the point of view of a Shirakawa-go local.

Nature Programs

April ~ November: Guided Nature Tour (9:30 am ~ 10:30 am • free for guests)

Explore the woods surrounding the Eco-Institute under the guidance of one of the knowledgeable "interpreters" who unravel the mysteries and wonders of nature for you!

December ~ March: Stroll through the Snowy Woods (8:30 am ~ 9:30 am, 10:30 am ~ 11:30 am • ¥1,000 per person)

Take a dive into the light, powdery snow of Shirakawa-go during the period from late December to mid-February, when the snow is still fresh. Alternatively, walk on top of the snow from late February on, after it has hardened enough to tread on. Get to places that you normally would not be able to reach otherwise, since the snow allows you to see the world from a perspective more than a meter higher off the ground than you are used to!

☎ 223 Magari, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎ 1 night + 2 meals: from ¥10,900 ☎ "Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [Courtsey car • 10 min] ☎ 05769-6-1187 ☎ <https://toyota.eco-inst.jp/?SLANG=ja&TLANG=en&XMODE=0&XCHARSET=utf-8&XSID=0>



Staying at a Guest House in Shirakawa-go

Almost all of the locations offering accommodation in Shirakawa-go are guest houses run by the families that live in them, so you can enjoy the experience of staying a night (or more!) at one of the famed thatched roof houses in the village! An altogether different feeling from staying at a large hotel or even at a traditional Japanese *ryokan* inn, lodging at a guest house has its own unique charms, especially when it is located in the heart of World Heritage Site Shirakawa-go!

Inexpensive option: At most of the guest houses in the village, a one-night stay with two meals included costs under ¥10,000, an extremely reasonable price.

Delicious local food: Nestled in the mountains right next to a river, you will be served plentiful amounts of fresh mountain herbs and river fish when staying at a guest house in Shirakawa-go. Enjoying local cuisine is one of the great pleasures of travel, and you are sure to be thoroughly satisfied in that regard.

Fantastic location: Quite simply, the chance to stay over in an isolated, quaint village such as Shirakawa-go is not the kind of opportunity you get often. Lodging in the village, which was meant to function in tune with nature, is an exceedingly calming experience that you are not likely to forget anytime soon! Staying at a guest house also affords you the chance to interact with some locals, as well as possibly travelers from other places. This kind of cultural exchange is another facet of the guest house experience that you rarely get in more traditional accommodation facilities.

How to book accommodations:

1. Contact the guest house of your choice directly by phone (Japanese only in some cases)

2. E-mail (recommended) or fax the Shirakawa-go Tourist Association with your reservation request (English OK)

E-mail: info@shirakawa-go.gr.jp

Fax: 05769-6-1716

☎ 05769-6-1013 (9 am ~ 5 pm • Japanese only)

☎ (Information on accommodations) <http://shirakawa-go.gr.jp/en/stay/>



7 Myozen-ji Temple and Museum 明善寺土館



Built around 230 years ago, Myozen-ji Temple is one of the few Buddhist temples in Japan that are of the *gassho-zukuri* thatched roof construction style. The *shoromon* bell tower gate was built in 1801 by one of the craftsmen of Hida renowned for their excellence, and its two-story structure characteristic of the late Edo period is a highly distinctive element of great architectural interest. Because of its unique attributes, Myozen-ji has been designated an Important Cultural Property of the prefecture. Adjacent to the temple is the local museum that displays old farming tools, furniture, kitchenware, and other remnants of an age gone by.

☎ 679 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎ 8:30 am ~ 5 pm (December ~ March: 9 am ~ 4 pm) ☎ ¥300 (Middle and elementary school students: ¥100) ☎ "Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [10-minute walk] ☎ 05769-6-1009



8 Shirakawa-go no Yu 白川郷の湯



The sole hot spring facility within the village of Ogimachi, Shirakawa-go no Yu is the perfect place to enjoy a relaxing hour or two, looking out over the village and the Sho River from the warmth of an open-air *onsen* bath! Rooms are also available for lodging, so this is another option for those interested in staying overnight in Shirakawa-go. In addition to the open-air baths, the facility has indoor baths, whirlpool baths, and two types of saunas that switch every day between male and female-use. The *onsen* water is of the salt spring type, containing sodium chloride that is said to have healing effects on those afflicted with nerve or joint pain, chronic digestive diseases, poor circulation, and more!

☎ 837 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎ 7 am ~ 9 pm ☎ ¥700 (Elementary school students: ¥300) ☎ None ☎ "Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [1-minute walk] ☎ 05769-6-0026 ☎ <http://www.shirakawagou-onsen.jp/english.html>

☎ ¥100 off admission (Valid until March 31, 2021)



9 Genki na Yasaikan 元気な野菜館



Fresh vegetables harvested in Shirakawa-go and edible wild plants are available at this local produce market, as are various other regional products. You can also get your hands on some homemade, pre-packaged side dishes and sweets that have become favorites of visitors.

☎ 2483 Oro, Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎ 11 am ~ 5 pm ☎ Tuesday ~ Thursday ☎ "Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [10-minute walk] ☎ 05769-6-1377



10 Jiba Studio Gallery じ・ば工房



The "Jiba" in this shop's name has several layers of meaning; the first is a reference to *jiba sangyo*, the term in Japanese for "local industry." The second, if you separate it into "ji" and "ba," is a combination of sounds taken from the terms for "grandpa" (*ojiisan*) and grandma (*obaasan*). You can think of the Jiba Studio Gallery, therefore, as a kind of mom-and-pop store that specializes in local products of Shirakawa-go! As a workshop in addition to a store, the Jiba Studio Gallery creates a lot of what it sells, and you can also try your hand at making some of these items with a reservation (by phone • Japanese only). From making straw *zori* sandals and wooden coasters to dyeing cloth and weaving, there are lots of hands-on activities that you can enjoy (at a fee). ☎ 6 Iijima, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎ 9 am ~ 5 pm ☎ Monday ☎ "Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [15-minute walk] ☎ 05769-6-1330



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11 Bunsuke 文助



This restaurant is highly reputed for the freshness of its fish, as each order is prepared starting with a live one. Along with the grilled fish that is Bunsuke's specialty, the rice served here is also homegrown, delivering a memorable, eco-friendly dining experience. ☎1915 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎11 am ~ 3 pm (Reservations required after 3 pm) 📍"Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [7-minute walk] ☎05769-6-1268

📺 10% off the bill (Valid until March 31, 2021)



12 Hina コーヒー屋 鄙



Boasting a wonderfully calming ambience with classical music playing in the background, Hina uses spring water from deep in the mountains in all of its coffee and tea.

☎1178 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎9:30 am ~ 5 pm
 ☒ Wednesday, 1st & 3rd Thursday of the month
 📍"Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [2-minute walk] ☎05769-6-1150

📺 Candy treat (No expiration date)



13 Kita no Sho 基太の庄



In this 250 year-old *gassho-zukuri* house looking out over the Sho River, you can satisfy your hunger with cuisine typical of a *satoyama* village, one which is located in the mountains and that exists in harmony with its natural environment. Hida beef miso steak and the salt-grilled char fish set menu are among the most popular choices. This restaurant fills up quickly, so a reservation is recommended. ☎2671-1 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎11 am ~ 2 pm (time changes depending on the day) 📍"Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [15-minute walk] ☎05769-6-1506 ☎http://www.hidatakayama.ne.jp/kitanosyo/index.html

📺 One free confection (Valid until March 31, 2021)



14 Nomura 乃むら



Using locally grown buckwheat ground in a homemade stone mortar and spring water taken from the sacred Hakusan mountain range, Nomura makes its deliciously chewy soba noodles that are sure to please.

☎779 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun
 ☎11 am ~ 4 pm (Or until supplies last)
 ☒ Wednesday 📍"Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [10-minute walk] ☎05769-6-1508



15 Ochudo 落人



A thatched roof house turned into a café, Ochudo is a great place to rest after strolling the village. Here, they use natural spring water and provide a selection of dishes that bring out the natural flavors of the ingredients to their fullest.

☎792 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun
 ☎11 am ~ 5 pm
 📍"Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [10-minute walk] ☎05769-6-1603, ☎090-5458-0418

📺 Zenzai red bean soup (Valid until March 31, 2021)



16 Gensaku 源作



This *gassho-zukuri* guest house boasts a very central location in Shirakawa-go and also allows guests the opportunity to eat around an *irori* hearth. The menu is heavily centered around local ingredients and features mouth-watering food such as Hida beef and deep-fried mountain herb tempura. ☎221 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎1 night + 2 meals: from ¥9,800 (October ~ March: an additional heating fee of ¥500 applies) 📍"Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [5-minute walk] ☎05769-6-1176

📺 Small gift (No expiration date)



17 Hisamatsu 久松

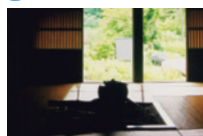


A thatched roof guest house where you will be served regional cuisine that incorporates ingredients grown and caught locally. You can enjoy, as many Japanese did in centuries past, eating around a traditional *irori* sunken hearth that keeps the room warm especially during the winter months. ☎585 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎1 night + 2 meals: from ¥8,700 (Winter time: an additional heating fee of ¥500 ~ ¥700 applies) 📍"Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [13-minute walk] ☎05769-6-1551

📺 Small gift (Valid until March 31, 2021)



18 Magoemon 孫右工門



Old even by Shirakawa-go *gassho-zukuri* standards, Magoemon is a fantastic guest house whose black insides, turned that shade because of the smoke emanating from the hearth, speak to the long history of the structure. ☎360 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎1 night + 2 meals: from ¥10,260 (October ~ April: an additional heating fee of ¥700 applies) 📍"Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [10-minute walk] ☎05769-6-1167

📺 Afternoon refreshments (Valid until March 31, 2021)



19 Otaya 大田屋



In addition to running this *gassho-zukuri* guest house, Mr. Ota also raises Hida cattle on the side, so as a guest at Otaya, you can have the unique experience of helping, however slightly, to care for the animals. Additionally, there are other hands-on activities that you can enjoy, such as reaping and harvesting rice and pounding *mochi* rice cakes! ☎1807 Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎1 night + 2 meals: from ¥10,500 (November ~ March: an additional heating fee of ¥500 applies) 📍"Ogimachi" bus stop → [3-minute walk] ☎05769-6-1425 ☎http://www.hidatakayama.ne.jp/otaya/JPN/

📺 Medium beer or small bottle of sake (Valid until March 31, 2021)



20 Tosuke no Yu Fujiya 藤助の湯 ふじや



An old, elegant Japanese-style inn that was reconstructed here after being moved from elsewhere in the Hida region, Fujiya has private hot spring baths that can be reserved in addition to its regular, communal *onsen* baths. Located 20 minutes away from central Shirakawa-go by car. ☎325-1 Hirase, Shirakawa-mura, Ono-gun ☎1 night + 2 meals: from ¥16,200 📍"Shirakawa-go" bus stop → [Nohi Bus on the Shirakawa-go/Kanazawa Line towards Kanazawa · 15 min] → "Hirase Onsen" bus stop → [3-minute walk] ☎05769-5-2611 ☎http://www.tosuke-fujiya.com/en/

📺 Post-breakfast coffee (Valid until March 31, 2021)

