

April 29, 30 2017

Meet the villagers in Tohyamago

*~A guided bilingual tour at Japan's deepest backcountry Tohyamago,
Nagano Prefecture ~*

April tour: Walking Tour of A Historical Mountain Pass



Ashigami Shrine : the starting point

Date : April 29 and 30 (Sat and Sun)

Place : Tohyamago, Iida City, Nagano Prefecture

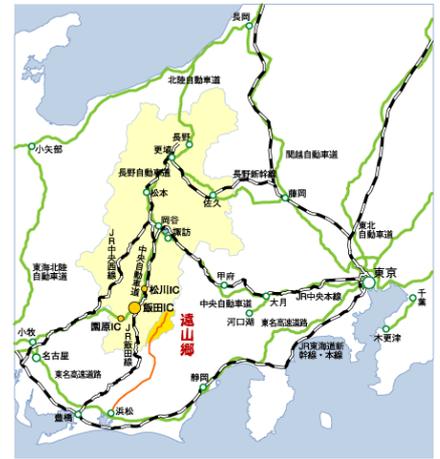
Organizer : Aeruba Inc.

Travel Agent : Matsukawa Tour Bus Inc.

<1. About Tohyamago>

If you are interested in pre-modern Japan, you should come to Tohyamago and meet the villagers with our coordinator there. Tohyamago is a village of folklore and gorgeous nature with at least 8 thousand year history, and is rare even for a Japanese to see its unique landscape, talk to villagers and have a banquet with them.

Tohyamago is a name of region at the valley running from north to south in the middle of South Alps of Honsyu. If you draw a line between centers of Tokyo and Osaka, it falls just on the line, and if you have a chance to take a flight from Tokyo/Haneda to Kyusyu or Shikoku, the airplane usually flies just over Tohyamago and you can look down the whole area from the cabin after 5 minutes abeam Mount Fuji if weather allows.



Tohyamago is the southernmost area of Nagano Prefecture, now is in Iida city, but were independent villages until 10 years ago. The bottom of the valley is about 400 meters above sea level, and highest point is over three thousand meters

which are the peaks of South Alps. We can drive up to “Shirabiso Height” at one thousand nine hundred meters with magnificent panoramic view climbing through winding but paved roads, where there is a modern hotel with a restaurant. At the bottom, there is a dynamic hot spring, several inns, restaurants, souvenir shops and museums.

Between this one thousand five hundred meter range, there is gorgeous nature everywhere. Less than one thousand five hundred people reside at more than 20 settlements in whole Toyamago, each settlement is divided by a hill or a small canyon, so there were places where one can reach only by walking. Now such places are really rare, but each settlement has its own history tracing back sometimes more than eight hundred years ago, the inhabitants are proud of their own settlements, they have their own festivals which have a history more than five hundred years and have their own folklore which is at the risk of vanishing because more and more young people leave settlements for metropolitan area.



Honestly speaking, industry in Tohyamago is decaying in the same way as other rural area in Japan. But historically, it had been a nationwide prominent place for forestry. Tohyamago is surrounded by deep forests at the western slope of South Alps, where is by far the isolated area in Honsyu. There had been inexhaustible natural resouces here, forest, fish, animal, bird, plant and pure water with distinct four seasons .



It is more than surprise but from medieval period, the top rulers of Japan had been interested in Tohyamago. About nine hundred years ago, the Top Samurai at Kyoto governed this area, who had tremendous treasure, some of them can be seen in Miyajima, west of Japan. After him, the first Shogun, the Top Samurai who settled at Kamakura, not Kyoto, governed this area. They developed many settlements in Tohyamago, built shrines

and said to have started festivals. About seven hundred years ago, Kamakura Shogun was extinct and Japan plunged into a long standing war era. Samurai, landlord of regions fought each other endlessly and Tohyamago was governed by families of Mr. Tohyama, Samurai and the landlords here. Name of Tohyamago is given after his family name. Go



means region. At the end of war era, about four hundred years ago, he had become a subordinate of Tokugawa Shogun who started his government in Edo, old name of Tokyo. Many timbers and wooden plates were exported to Edo, and used for the framework of the tallest building in Edo Castle or for the roof of many houses. Tohyama family were unlucky enough to be extinct at the beginning of Tokugawa Shogun Era, Tohyamago was directly governed by Shoguns until the end of Shogun era. At the near end of that period, many timbers were exported to Kyoto to rebuild a grand temple there.

Now in Tohyamago, many folklore, stone statues of local Buddhism, shrines and festivals are said to have started in Tokugawa Shogun era, and if you look at tombs of villagers, you can easily find names of deceased in this period.

At one hundred fifty years ago, Japan started modernization, modern regional government took care Tohyamago. But the richest forest area was owned by Emperor in Tokyo, so central government in Tokyo directly managed the richest forests and produced countless timbers and wooden plates. During WW2, Japan needed more resources, they started to construct forest railway to bring timbers from mountains to the main driveway. After WW2, the landlord changed from Emperor to central government, wooden resources were still desperately needed. That made Tohyamago rich and prospering until about fifty years ago, the peak population in Tohyamago was more than six thousand, four times more than now. After coming the age shifting materials from wood to oil, local to import, forest resources development in Tohyamago had almost finished. Population started decreasing, some of the isolated settlements were abandoned but still making green teas, growing mushrooms, feeding fishes and many construction works had become main industries in Tohyamago.



But we could not stop people leaving here. Ten years ago, Tohyamago was merged to a bigger city, Iida at last. It was a shock for all people in this historical region. Then some of villagers and we started initiative to promote here for tourism.

Japan's economy, driven by modernization and quantity expansion already peaked out at 1990. After this, Japan is quietly moving to more healthy and sustainable society although there are still many negative problems, tourism in Japan has become revived nationwide about fifteen years ago. Now many tourists come to Tohyamago from many places, sometimes from foreign countries. Today tourism is one of the most important industries in Japan, especially in rural area where young generation is becoming scarce



I am the person who first established the value of revived tourism in 2004 as CEO of NSP. It was conveyed to the central government then became nationwide movements. Tourism is usually called sight-seeing. It means seeing sights. But in Japanese, tourism is called light-seeing, seeing light! It comes from Chinese literature but it makes very sense. Why people go out for travel? Of course the most common answer is for business or pleasure. But sometimes people go to travel to get answers for their lives or encounter unusual experience to change their lives. It is like lightening to change one's imaginary world. Once the lightening



comes in, it brightens one's future. This is the tourism, seeing light!

Then where can we encounter lightening? Delicious foods? Unique landscape? Curious souvenirs? Yes, maybe. But the most certain lightening comes from the experience talking to locals who love to live there. Perhaps many people living in metropolitan area like living there because it is convenient. But people living in rural area, especially at isolated settlements, the answer is not convenience. The answer is the pride to live there. Pride to live there even if it is so inconvenient and sometimes



dangerous. This is beyond modern philosophy but common concept before modernization. We had already peaked out of modernization era in Japan, increasing number of Japanese are looking for a new paradigm fitting to coming age. My concept of revived tourism is that the most important resource of tourism is locals who are proud of living there. So let's introduce such pride to other people and make certain to keep that pride forever by supporting them.

We have had more than 60 guided tours in Tohyamago in this 10 years. Always it is one night and two days tour, contents are visiting historically, naturally and geologically unique places in Tohyamago, having experience and banquet with locals and then a bit of my talk. We had been open for foreign people from the beginning, but only Japanese language is used. Today we have a licensed tour guide for foreigners here, so it becomes bilingual!

Please have a look at details below and ask any questions. I am looking forward to seeing you Tohyamago very soon.

Coordinator : Naoya Fujiwara
Principal of Tohyama Fujiwara Social School
CEO of NSP
CEO of Aeruba



<2. April Tour>



Japan has a very long history as you know, at least from one thousand four hundred year ago, we have a written history. But there are many archaeological remains all over Japan, the most old one is thirty five thousand year ago, so you may believe or not, we have been living in this country from the era without agriculture, bureaucracy or perhaps characters.

We do not have a proven evidence how our ancestor had lived in such old days, but we have a few "realistic" myth and a lot of folklore which describe the history.

The lifestyle may not be so different from those of other Asian regions, but our religion is Shinto, as well known, it is unique here. And Politics has a core value which must not be derailed at any time. A core value of politics? Yes, it is not well known by real politicians now a days, but you can find that we are safe and stable when Japan follows the line guided by the core value. But when we deviate from it, a lot of confusion, fight, and deterioration have occurred.



One of the most chaotic time was from the mid 15th to the early 17th century, when the supreme control was lost over local lords and they fought uncontrollably with each other. Tohyamago was also under the influence and a historic battle was fought near Tohyamago between two powerful samurai powers in the late 16th century. One was the Tokugawa Ieyasu, who actually ended the age of war and brought peace to Japan 30 years later, starting Tokugawa Shogunate. The opponent Takeda clan, who was one of the most powerful one in the period, went over a mountain in Tohyamago, Aokuzure Toge. Toge means a mountain.

A local walking tour was held last October, on the same mountain pass as the samurai troops of Takeda clan went on. Aokuzure Toge is on the border between Nagano and Shizuoka Prefecture and local people on both sides worked together on a local revitalization project on restoration of the historic but badly damaged pass. The walking event was held to celebrate its restoration and their hard work met with a success, attracting more than 200 people. The second one will be held this spring, April 30th. We're going to join the event and walk 10 kilometers of the pass but there is also a 5 kilometer course on the route so participants could choose according to their conditions.



We're also going to take you to some other locally traditional places since Tohyamago is still far from urbanization and full of historic spots. One of such places is Ryuenji temple, which dates from early 19th century. You'll enjoy its magnificent building but what will make you more amazed is three big cedar trees, which are more than 500 years old. The natural spring water should be tried, which flow out of under the ground of the temple. The water has been relieving people's thirst for more than 400 years.

Next to Ryuenji temple is Wada Castle Museum. The castle was reconstructed on the site Wada castle had been located in the medieval times in honor of the Tohyama family reign. In the museum are some videos about the tradition of the area shown and more than 200 masks exhibited, which were used in Shimotsuki Matsuri, a local ceremonial festival. Also, there's a café space in there and you can take some break with a cup of coffee brewed with mineral water coming up from the ground of Ryuenji temple.



Shimotsuki festival is a very traditional one with 800 years of history. It's held in every December and features ritual dances and a ritual of splashing boiling water by masked people. In Shinto's idea, gods become less powerful in December so hot water is offered for their bath time, hoping revitalization of gods' power and a coming happy new year. Mask performance is absolutely eccentric and interesting to see but another interesting thing is that people keep very traditional rituals during the whole festival, even in preparations. Local people make religious decorations





by hand. They even make scrub brushes of dried straws to purify the hearths and strings of wood skin to tie some ritual decorations.

Shimotsuki festival is held in 12 shinto shrines across Tohyamago and there are some differences in styles between each place. Some places even remake the hearth from the scratch every year. Water for purification is fetched from a river by a boy and a girl. Many things are prepared in traditional ways and people still keep to it. Participation in the preparations could be very interesting! Masks are purified by pray and some people wear them and acts local gods. The most exciting scenes are "hot water splash" and "four gods' dives". A few of the gods splash boiling hot water around to share it with people. In "four gods' dives", four masked men perform rounds of mosh and dive. The four men have already been purified by ritual purification in a nearby river in a cold winter night. It brings a lot of excitement into the serious rituals.



The festival finishes at dawn in some places, beginning the early afternoon. Preparation starts much earlier. It's eccentric and curious to see but it's actually an seriously religious services and a part of lives for people in Tohyamago. It's designated as Important Intangible Cultural Property by Japanese government.

Dinner time is one of our tour's highlights. Actually, it's probably the most meaningful moment in the tour. You could go see things in trips but there should be not so many opportunities to meet and interact with local people. The subtitle of this tour is "Meet the villagers in Tohyamago" and we're going to provide you with the opportunity. You might be concerned about language issue but they know that communication will be done well by not only language but also singing, dancing and just a little bit of alcohol.

We hope that you'll feel natural godness of human nature beyond nationality. We think we used to have it but have left it somewhere since we have only pursued economic growth and more convenient life. We hope you could find it in the interaction with people in the distant village of Japan.



<3. Itinerary>

Day 1.

Time	To Do	
12 : 30 pm	Meet at Anbamai-kan in a roadside station “Tohyamago” —Orientation	
12 : 45	Lunch	
1 : 30	Ryuen-ji and Wada Castle museum with coffee break	Anbamai-kan
3 : 00	Leave for the former Kizawa elementary school —drop by Kumano shrine	
3 : 50	Tour of the school and Kizawa area	Wada Castle
4 : 30	Tea ceremony in a Japanese style room	
5 : 15	Bathing time in Kagurano - yu Onsen	
6 : 15	Leave for Shimabata Inn	
6 : 30	Dinner with villagers	
9 : 00 pm	Karaoke night if wanted	
		
		the former Kizawa school
		
		Tohyama River

Day 2.

Time	To Do	
7 : 00 am	Japanese style breakfast	
7 : 45	Traditional Japanese sweet shop -	
8 : 00	Walking tour participation Application status check at Kagurano – yu Onsen Receive boxed lunch <u>¥3,000 event fee is not included in the tour fare</u>	
8 : 30	Leave by free shuttle bus for the starting point	
9 : 30	Start at Ashigami Shrine	
After	Goal at Konota area	
12 : 00	Go to Kagurano-yu by free shuttle bus Lunch and Onsen break if wanted	
2 : 00 pm	Leave for Shimabata	
2 : 30	Lecture on domestic and foreign affairs by Naoya Fujiwara	
15 : 50	End of the tour	
<u>¥3,000 event fee includes accident and health insurance.</u>		
<u>Schedule can be changed in case of stormy weather.</u>		
<u>Drive will be given from Shimabata after the tour to the bus stop at Kagurano-yu if you take JR train.</u>		
		Aosuzure Mountain pass
		
		Ashigami Shrine

<4. Fare> (Tax included)

<u>Adult (13 and over)</u>	<u>¥ 51,840</u>
<u>Adult (13 and over) in case you drive your own car within the tour</u>	<u>¥ 41,040</u>
<u>Child (under 13)</u>	<u>Half of the fare above</u>
<u>Lecture only (2 : 30 pm ~4 : 00 pm on Sunday)</u>	<u>¥ 5,000</u>

(1) Fare includes

- Accommodations (room will be shared)
- 1 breakfast, 2 lunches, 1 dinner
- Transportation within the tour (not in case you drive your own car)
- Admission fee to museums
- Lecture fee / Guide fee
- Travel insurance



Accommodations :
Shimabata Inn

(2) Fare excludes

- Transportation to / from Tohyamago
- Personal expense
- **Walking event fee**
- Travel insurance

<5. Application>

Please email to the address with the information below. We'll contact you as soon as possible.

iwamoto@eruba.co.jp (contact person : Hiroshi Iwamoto (Mr.))

1. Name
2. Age
3. Phone number
4. Your choice (¥ 51,840 / ¥ 41,040 / Lectures only)
5. Your request if any

<6. Cancellation Policy>

Tour cancellation must be informed by email to iwamoto@eruba.co.jp

The amount below will be refunded in case you cancel the tour.

- 20 % of the tour fare : cancelled 20 days or later before the tour date.
- 30 % of the tour fare : cancelled 7 days or later before the tour date.
- 20 % of the tour fare : cancelled 20 days or later before the tour date.
- 50 % of the tour fare : cancelled the day before the tour date.
- No refund : cancelled on the day of the tour.

<7. Contact Us>

Aeruba Inc.



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