

EMBARK ON A WINTER ADVENTURE IN SHONAI



Shonai in Yamagata is beautiful all year round, but going in winter offers a chance at some unique experiences. Yamagata Prefecture is known as Snow Country, boasting the highest snowfall of any of the 47 prefectures in Japan. It's a veritable winter wonderland with activities and stunning sights galore. Read on for a guide to experiencing the best of Shonai's winter in one day.

Snowshoe Walking on Mount Haguro

Put on a pair of snowshoes, grab some ski poles and make your way through a dense cedar forest into one of the most spiritual places in Shonai. After a short hike, you'll reach Suga Waterfall, under which aesthetics would sit under as part of their spiritual practice. A little further on, you'll find the imposing Jiji-sugi (grandfather cedar tree), an old cedar tree purported to be over 1,000 years old. Finally, you'll see a stunning structure of architectural brilliance — the Mount Haguro Five-story Pagoda — covered in a crown of snow. This 29m-high five-story pagoda was built over 600 years ago and has stood the test of time through earthquakes and annual heavy snowfall. It is made entirely of wood and remains unpainted, offering beauty in its simplicity, decorated only by layers of pure white snow.

Cook Local Fare at Kurashiki LUNA Katanoya

Now that you've worked up an appetite, head to Kurayashiki LUNA Katanoya for an exclusive cooking lesson. Here you can make some traditional Japanese fare, including seasonal Shonai specialties. Under the guidance of expert chef Wataru Sato, you will learn how to cook a selection of simple but delicious dishes that you and your group will dine upon afterwards. The meal includes extra dishes made by the chef to create a luxurious meal to remember. www.web-luna.com/en/

Zazen Experience at Gyokusenji Temple

For a post-lunch spiritual experience, head to Gyokusenji Temple for a free zazen (zen meditation) session with a backdrop of one of Japan's most beautiful temple gardens. Gaze peacefully at your surroundings as you embark upon a spiritual experience guided by the temple's head priest. Top off the experience with a freshly whipped cup of matcha and a seasonal sweet for only ¥500 and take a walk around the snow-covered garden. Note: Though the zazen session is free, there is an entrance fee to the temple grounds. You may request a session when you visit, but reservations are recommended to ensure availability of the head priest. www.gyokusenji.or.jp

Feel Like Royalty at Yunohama Onsen

Japan is known as the land of the rising sun, but the west coast is most famous for its stunning sunsets. There are dozens of fantastic locations to watch the sun go down, but Yunohama Onsen is one of the best. Yunohama Onsen is a historic hot spring resort dating back over 1,000 years. For a luxurious view of the sunset and the snow, enjoy it from the comfort of an open-air bath at Kameya, an illustrious Japanese-style inn that has hosted the Emperor of Japan. Dinners here boast a stellar selection of some of Shonai's finest offerings served in a kaiseki (multi-course) meal format, with

each dish more decorative and delicious than the last.

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