**The Former *Oshi* Lodging House of the Togawa Family**

At the height of the Fujiko faith’s popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, thousands of pilgrims came every summer to make the ritual climb to the summit of Mt. Fuji. Most chapters of the religion sent a small group each year. The first port of call was a pilgrims’ inn kept by an *oshi,* one of the Shinto priests who provided the pilgrims with spiritual guidance as well as supplies and equipment for the climb.

At one time, as many as 86 *oshi* inns could be found in Fujiyoshida, but only a handful still offer accommodation. Instead of joining them, the Togawa family opted to convert the inn run by their ancestors into a living museum, where visitors can see exhibits detailing how Fujiko pilgrims once prepared for their climb.

**Purification and Preparation**

*Oshi* inns were built on long, narrow plots of land that maximized the number of inns that could fit side by side along the main street. In front of each inn was a garden with stone monuments and a channel of water drawn from mountain streams for purification. The inns had several entrances, the grandest of which were reserved for high-ranking officials, visitors of great spiritual attainment, and the *oshi* himself.

Beyond the entrance, each inn was laid out differently. The Togawa Inn, for example, was divided into two sections: the *omoya* or “main building,” which housed the kitchen and dining areas, and the *urazashiki* or “rear rooms” added later at the back of the property. Lodging 20 to 30 people every day required a great deal of tableware, bedding, and other sundries, and the Fujiko tradition met this need in a unique way. Chapters donated necessary supplies to “their” inn, each striving to outdo the others in generosity to show their piety. Because visits were planned in advance, the staff was able to rotate through the inn’s various sets of plates and utensils to ensure that each group was served on the tableware it had contributed. To maintain these permanent ties, *oshi* would spend the off-season traveling to Edo and elsewhere to visit Fujiko chapters at their homes.

The spiritual heart of the Togawa Inn lay in the rear rooms. In the room called the *goshinzen*, meaning “before the divine,” the *oshi* would preach to the pilgrims about their faith and the ascetic practices to be carried out during their climb. He also prayed to Mt. Fuji on the pilgrims’ behalf while the leader of the pilgrims, known as the *sendatsu*, led the others in chants expressing the tenets of the faith. Recordings of those ceremonies are played at the Togawa Inn to re-create the mystical atmosphere that prevailed during those times.

The rear rooms were also where the pilgrims slept, enjoying one last night of comfort before the rigors of the ascent. Relative comfort, at least: During peak summer climbing season, there were so many guests that some had to sleep out in the corridors.

**Artifacts from the Past**

The main part of the Togawa family inn was built in 1768, while the rear rooms were added a century later, around 1860. Apart from necessary maintenance and restoration, the building is kept just as it was when it still served pilgrims. The inn houses a number of valuable artifacts, including a statue of Jikigyo Miroku (1671–1733), a revered figure whose teachings brought the Fujiko faith to the masses. There is also a rare example of a *gyoi*, the white garment worn by pilgrims on the climb. The same article of clothing was used to dress the deceased, reflecting the faith’s view of Mt. Fuji as a spiritual realm beyond the world of the living. Pilgrims had their *gyoi* stamped at shrines and checkpoints along the ascent, so that each garment became a record of their devotion.

**The Osano House**

Visitors seeking to learn more about *oshi* inns should also visit the exact reproduction of an inn once run by the Osano family that has been built on the grounds of the Fujisan Museum. Comparing this with the Togawa Inn reveals how each *oshi* lineage maintained its own traditions within the broader outlines of the faith.