**City of Ojiya**

Colorful koi fish, exciting bull sumo tournaments, and finely crafted cloth: Ojiya City abounds with fascinating cultural heritage and age-old traditions. The region is located in the Echigo area of Niigata Prefecture, near the Sea of Japan, and receives heavy amounts of snowfall each winter.

The snow provides mineral-rich meltwater for the area’s koi ponds and rice fields, and has played a role in the town’s development as a center of Ojiya *chijimi* fabric production. Teams from all over Japan compete in the annual Ojiya Hot Air Balloon Festival held in winter against a backdrop of snow. In the warmer months, visitors can watch thrilling, non-lethal *tsunotsuki* bullfighting tournaments.

*Ojiya* chijimi

The delicately crimped Ojiya *chijimi* fabric has been produced in the region for over 400 years. Creating the woven textile involves multiple processes that have been passed down for many generations. Displays at the Orinoza Exhibition Hall illustrate the process, from extracting plant fibers and turning them into thread to naturally bleaching and softening the woven fabric in the snow.

Nishikigoi *carp*

Opposite the Orinoza Exhibition Hall is Nishikigoi no Sato, which houses hundreds of colorful *nishikigoi* carp in aquariums, viewing pools, and Japanese garden ponds. Here visitors can learn how these colorful koi evolved from black carp, and observe over 20 different varieties.

Tsunotsuki *bullfighting*

Traditional “bull sumo,” known as *tsunotsuki*, is a custom that has lasted for over a thousand years. The matches are exciting, and spectators can watch strong Nambushorthorn bulls lock horns, while handlers urge them on. No bulls are harmed during the events. *Tsunotsuki* events take place once a month from May to November.

*Festivals*

Other events include the Ojiya Festival in August, the Katakai Fireworks Festival in September, and the spectacular winter Ojiya Hot Air Balloon Festival, when dozens of brightly colored balloons float above the snow-covered landscape.

*Local specialties*

Visitors to Ojiya can enjoy the area’s high quality rice and sake, and local specialties such as *hegi* soba (buckwheat noodles made with seaweed as a binder).

*Outdoor activities*

Nature enthusiasts can enjoy outdoor activities including bird watching, hiking, and snowshoeing at Yamamotoyama Highland. In spring, groves of cherry trees bloom with light pink blossoms at Funaoka Park, a pleasant spot for a stroll outdoors.

*How to get there*

Ojiya Station is accessible from Tokyo by the Joetsu Shinkansen and the local Joetsu Line in around two hours. Flights from Osaka connect to Niigata Airport, with transfers to the Shinetsu and Joetsu Lines.