

The first thing you notice while approaching this historic Shinto shrine nestled against a hillside is the giant sacred Japanese cedar at the bottom of the staircase. This ancient tree, which even survived a lightning stroke, is estimated to be at least 1,000 years old, and is over 40 meters tall and up to 10 meters in diameter. Surrounded by thirty massive conifers, this sacred tree has been designated a Natural Monument of Hakuba village.

The Hosono Suwa Shrine used to be the destination for villagers to pray for rain in the hope of a rich autumn harvest, but nowadays it's best-known as the site of the *Reitaisai*, Hakuba Happo-one's annual festival, and *ninen-mairi*, the shrine visit that marks the beginning of a new year.

The *Reitaisai*, usually in autumn, includes the Yukake Matsuri, a procession that features a portable shrine, which houses a 300 kg–heavy serpentinite rock, carried through the village. The shrine carriers are splashed with hot spring water from Hakuba Happo-one. The spectacle ends at Hosono Suwa Shrine, where everyone can feast on typical festival fare such as *yakisoba* (stir-fried noodles), *butajiru* (miso soup with pork and vegetables), and cotton candy— and enjoy lively *taiko* drumming performances. During *ninen-mairi*, which takes place between the sun setting on the old year and rising on the new, the premises are beautifully illuminated and often covered by the sparkling white snow. This is the only night when you are able to purchase the coveted lucky charms of Hosono Suwa Shrine.

Since this sacred place is just a five-minute walk from the Adam gondola lift station, stop by at any time of year and take in the mystical atmosphere in this tranquil setting.