

Typical Japanese-style guest houses run by families, known as *minshuku*, are a great way to experience traditional hospitality without breaking the bank. Usually to be found in villages, *minshuku* are usually spare rooms in family homes. The concept of this housing style began in Hosono (modern-day Hakuba Happo-one) during the first half of the 20th century, and is deeply connected with the village's history of mountain climbing.

Until the end of the Edo period (1603–1867), Happo-one's Shirouma mountain range was believed to be a sacred site and climbing was forbidden. After the Meiji Restoration at the end of the 19th century, regulations loosened and Mt. Shirouma and its surrounding peaks were finally measured and opened up to explorers and geologists, botanists and famous mountaineers flocked to the area. One was the British pastor and mountaineer Walter Weston. Considered the “father of mountaineering in Japan,” he conquered Mt. Shirouma in 1894 and assembled his impressions in the book *Mountaineering and Exploration in the Japanese Alps* (1896). The popularity of Weston's book, along with the publication of 50,000 topographic maps of the mountain site in 1913 and the connection to the Shinano Railway three years later, making it possible to visit directly from Tokyo, combined to draw more and more mountaineers to Happo-one.

To accommodate the adventurers, a number of guides offered visitors the opportunity to spend the night at their own houses, instead of staying at a *ryokan* (typical Japanese inn). In 1937, sixteen houses of local guides in Hosono gained permission to provide lodging for travelers—marking the beginning of the *minshuku* business. The area rapidly developed into a ski and mountain resort in 1948, and about ten years later 295 individual *minshuku* provided accommodation for about 13,000 guests.