

***Gassho*-Style Houses in Gokayama**

Gokayama is best known for the two World Heritage villages of Ainokura and Suganuma, with their *gassho-zukuri* (steep thatched roof) houses. The term *gassho-zukuri* translates as “in the style of hands in prayer,” describing the signature roof design.

This style of architecture developed in response to the region’s unique environment, climate, and industries. The steep thatched roof accommodates the weight of the heavy snows common to the region. The attic space within the roof structure is well suited for the production of silk. *Gassho-zukuri* houses are built without the use of nails; instead, ropes and natural materials are used to secure the structure.

At first glance, the *gassho-zukuri* houses in Gokayama and in nearby Shirakawa-go look the same. However, there are regional differences. *Gassho-zukuri* houses in Gokayama tend to have a steeper roof design than those in Shirakawa-go, since Gokayama gets more snow. In Gokayama, *gassho-zukuri* have gables with rounded edges, created by binding thatch to the barge with the cut ends of the thatch facing downward rather than sideways. In Shirakawa-go, the roofs are thatched with the material facing sideways. Another difference between the structures is that Gokayama’s houses generally have an entrance under one of the gable ends, whereas in Shirakawa-go, entrances are parallel to the ridge of the roof on the side of the building.