

### About Gassho-style Houses

The 10 houses in Gero Onsen Gassho Village are identified by their distinct thatched *gassho*-style roofs. *Gassho* means “praying hands,” as the shape of the roofs was thought to resemble two hands pressed together in prayer. The steeply slanted, triangle-shaped roofs prevent large amounts of snowfall—common in Gifu and Toyama Prefectures—from accumulating and crushing the homes. *Gassho*-style houses are architectural marvels, as only wood and rope were used to assemble them. The roofs are thatched with dried miscanthus grass (*susuki*). The houses give visitors a glimpse into the culture and traditions of nineteenth-century villages in Gifu Prefecture.

The houses are generally two or three stories, but there are exceptions such as the four-story Odo House. Every house has an *irori* floor hearth where a fire is constantly burning. The smoke from the hearth helps keep the roof dry and vermin-free. The second floor of some of the houses has an additional door to the outside, used when heavy snowfall would block the main door downstairs.

The first floor was dedicated to daily family responsibilities. In addition to the *irori* room, there is a kitchen, a dining room, and an altar for praying to ancestors. A steep, narrow staircase, much like a ladder, connects the floors. The upper floors were used for production, often for silkworm cultivation and reeling raw silk threads.

Nine of the houses in Gassho Village were transported from the village of Shirakawa within Gifu Prefecture, while the tenth was moved here from the Gokayama area in Toyama Prefecture.