

Discovering the History of the Minami Alps

The Minami Alps Ashiyasu Alpen Museum

The Minami Alps Ashiyasu Alpen Museum takes visitors on a journey through tens of thousands of years, from the formation of the Alps to the history of human habitation in the region. This airy, mountain-themed building was built in 2003, and is largely constructed from the honey-colored local wood. Both hikers and casual visitors can get to know the natural and cultural beauty of the Alps through the exhibits.

Upon entering the museum, guests will immediately spot an oversized pair of *wakanji*, snowshoes made from wood and straw rope. These are different from the snowshoes used in other parts of Japan with deeper snow, as they include two wooden spikes to provide a firm grip in the shallower, but often harder, local snowpack. This is just a hint of the insights into local culture introduced here.

For centuries, forestry was the region's main industry. While today cutting trees is restricted and carefully controlled, the museum offers a glimpse into the past with a large exhibit of handmade tools. As sustainable use of local forestry products is an important part of the area's designation as a Biosphere Reserve, visitors will find many local wood products on display.

The informative exhibits also introduce native plants and animals, the colorful characters who guided climbers during the early days of mountaineering in the Minami Alps, and hunting and climbing tools unique to the area. Children can learn about nature through play and interactive displays.

History buffs and climbing enthusiasts may wish to examine the museum's books and magazines about mountains and climbing, a huge collection considered one of the finest in Japan. Many were donated by private collectors, with some books dating back to the nineteenth century. While most are in Japanese, a quick look through the racks will reveal some fascinating vintage books in English, German, and other languages.