

## **Gassho-style Houses**

The traditional thatched farmhouses of Shirakawa-go are built in the gassho or “praying hands” style. The word refers to how the triangular shape of the steeply slanted roofs resembles two hands pressed together in prayer. In a gassho-style house, the gables, or triangular wall portions between the edges of the roof on both ends of the structure, are left exposed to wind and sunlight. This style of architecture developed in response to the area’s distinct environment, climate, and industries.

The slant of the roof prevents large amounts of snowfall, which is common in Shirakawa-go, from accumulating and damaging the house, while the unprotected walls on the gable ends are built at a slight outward angle to keep them as dry as possible when it rains. These walls usually have several large windows to let sunlight and air into the multi-level attic, which was traditionally used for silk farming, a major industry in Shirakawa-go until the first few decades of the twentieth century.