

Road Station Shirakawa-go and Gassho Museum

Road Station Shirakawa-go is a highway rest stop where visitors can sit down for a light meal and peruse souvenir shops that sell handicrafts, snacks, sweets, and other local specialties. The facility also includes the Gassho Museum, where informative displays provide insight into the history and structure of traditional gassho-style houses. The most notable of these exhibits is half of a life-size gassho farmhouse, which can be entered and examined at close range. Parts of the roof are thatched while others are left bare, giving visitors a cross-section view that helps them understand how the thatch is attached to the roof structure, which is secured by straw ropes and bindings (neso) made of witch hazel saplings. Mannequins are used to illustrate the work of the thatchers and their various roles, which include supervision, hauling the dry grass onto the roof, actual thatching, and securing the bundles of grass to the roof frame with rope. By the base of the display house stands a human-powered pile driver, the kind that was traditionally used in Shirakawa-go when pounding in the foundation stones of a gassho-style house. There are also explanatory panels around the exhibit.