

Mountain Activities

Minakami is an ideal location for a variety of outdoor activities. Forested mountains make up 90 percent of the area, and reservoirs, rivers, and other waterways make up much of the remainder. This vast wilderness is the perfect setting for outdoor sports.

Skiing was first introduced to the region in 1918, when forestry officials inspected the mountains, and many ski slopes opened after the completion of the Jōetsu rail line and Doai Station in 1931.

Mountaineering reached the Tanigawa Mountain Range in the 1920s, when two mountaineers, accompanied by a guide, followed old paths from Tsuchitaru via the mountain ridges to the town of Tanigawa Onsen. Today, companies offer guided hiking tours, and in autumn hikers travel to Mt. Tanigawadake to see the spectacular colors of the leaves.

Minakami has been a pioneer of commercial whitewater rafting and canyoning in Japan, and there are several companies that offer the opportunity to ride down the Tone River. In spring, its current in some sections is ranked around grade 4 on an international difficulty scale of 6. In summer, the current slows, and the difficulty rating drops to around grade 2, which is ideal for beginners. The half-day course generally covers 12 kilometers, and the daylong course covers approximately 25 kilometers. Other summer activities include bungee jumping, kayaking, and *sawanobori*, or “shower climbing” up a waterfall.

Fruit picking is a year-round activity that follows a rotating selection of fruits: strawberries in January through May, blueberries in June through July, plums in July through August, grapes in August and September, and apples in September through December.

Minakami has 18 main hot spring districts that offer overnight accommodation. Some hot springs also cater to day-trippers. Its 90 springs collectively produce 13,000 liters of hot water each minute. Written records show that Yujuku Onsen has been popular as far back as 852, and mention of Yubiso Onsen is first recorded in the eleventh century. Minakami’s spring water can be broadly divided into simple hot springs and sulfate hot springs. Simple hot springs have no odor or taste and are less irritating to sensitive skin. Sulfate hot springs have seawater components, such as magnesium, calcium, and sodium, and they are believed to lower blood pressure and promote healthy skin. A recent survey of tritium content by the Gunma Prefectural Hot Spring Association found that some of the water that flows from the Minakami springs is rainwater and snowmelt that seeps into the water table and is held for 50 years. As a result, the water reflects the state of the environment as it was 50 years in the past.