

## Yukyuzan Park

Yukyuzan Park draws many visitors in the springtime, especially from early to mid-April, when the cherry blossoms are in full bloom. Fall is another popular time to visit, with the autumn leaves adding a variety of browns, reds, and yellows to walking routes. The park is named after Mt. Yukyuzan, which lies just to the east. Its roots go back to the Edo period (1603–1867). Makino Tadatoki (1665–1722), lord of the Nagaoka domain, which was centered in this valley, oversaw the planting of several cherry trees. These added greatly to the area's attractions, making it a popular gathering place.

The park as we know it today opened in 1918 to commemorate Nagaoka's 300th anniversary. It was the brainchild of Yamada Matashichi (1855–1917), the founder of the Eneos Oil Company and a Nagaoka native.

Aoshi Shrine, near the park's entrance, is almost 250 years old. It is closely bound up with popular traditions, including the November custom of Shichi-Go-San ("Seven-Five-Three"), in which parents take children of those ages to the shrine to pray for their healthy growth.

Another shrine is dedicated to Shiro the Dog. According to local legend, Shiro's family moved to Nagaoka from Edo (present-day Tokyo) to live close to Aoshi Shrine, leaving Shiro behind. Shiro missed his family so much that he walked more than 250 kilometers from their former home to reunite with them. Shiro's Shrine was built in 2018 to mark Nagaoka's 400th anniversary.

Close to the shrine lies the "Snake Bridge," constructed by some of the city's senior citizens. Next to this bridge, visitors can also see a monument to Kobayashi Torasaburo (1828–1877), a writer and pioneer in education. Kobayashi is best known for developing the "Kome Hyappyo" (One Hundred Sacks of Rice) philosophy, which advocates reinvesting one's resources to create a better future. The name comes from his suggestion to sell rice donated by a neighboring clan without eating it, despite food shortages, and instead build a school for children.

Animal lovers or visitors with young children may enjoy the Yukyuzan Zoo, which has a monkey enclosure, among other attractions.

The Nagaoka City Museum of Local History is the park's major draw. The remarkable design of this white, multi-story building is inspired by the look of castles in feudal Japan, such as the original Nagaoka Castle, which was destroyed during the Boshin War in 1868.

Inside, the museum exhibits detail Nagaoka's history through the lives of people who made the city what it is today: the Makino family, which led the city for thirteen generations, and more recent notables, such as World War II naval leader Yamamoto Isoroku (1884–1943).