

## Shinhotaka Ropeway

The Shinhotaka Ropeway is the most popular tourist destination in the Oku-Hida area. Operating daily except during extreme weather conditions or high winds, a two-part ropeway carries visitors to Nishihotakaguchi Station, at an altitude of 2,156 meters, in around 25 minutes. The observation deck there offers an expansive view of the Northern Alps, including Mt. Nishihotakadake (2,909 m), Mt. Yurigatake (3,180 m), and Mt. Kasagatake (2,898 m).

The Shinhotaka Ropeway was originally envisaged as a sightseeing route that would connect Gifu and Nagano Prefectures, arching over the Hotaka Mountain Range to reach Kappa Bridge in the resort town of Kamikōchi. Financial, engineering, and environmental realities resulted in a much shorter route by the time it opened in 1970. Nevertheless, by 1975 it had served around a million passengers.

Today, the first half of the ropeway carries passengers from Shinhotaka Onsen Station (1,117 m) up to the transit point of Nabadaira Kōgen Station (1,305 m). From there it is a short walk to Shirakabadaira Station (1,308 m), starting point of the second half of the ropeway. Here visitors board Japan's only two-story gondola, an innovation designed to give as many passengers as possible a window-side view of the magnificent alpine landscape.

At the terminus is a large observation deck overlooking a broad stretch of the Northern Alps. Signs with English captions display the names and silhouettes of the peaks visible in three directions. A coffee shop on the deck serves freshly roasted coffee during warmer months; beneath it are a restaurant, a souvenir shop, and restrooms. Nishihotakaguchi Station shares the mountain ridge with Sengoku Park, a small forested area with a large number of flowering plant species; it is easily accessible from the station. The eaves of the building shelter another mountain resident: the Asian house martin (*iwatubame*), which breeds in the area in summer.

Despite the impressive view from the top, many ropeway passengers stop at the middle transit area to view nature displays at the visitor center or enjoy a leisurely soak in the open-air hot-spring baths. Near the Shirakabadaira Station is a foot bath where visitors can immerse their feet while watching the gondolas arrive and depart. The 2.3-kilometer nature trail has guided walks in summer and a snowshoe tour in winter, though they require reservations. Snacks, desserts, and fresh-baked bread are sold at Shirakabadaira Station.

The Shinhotaka Ropeway is located at the end of the Nōhi Bus Shinhotaka Line and is fully accessible by wheelchair.