

Shizukuishi Yu-Yu Farm and Horseback Archery (*Yabusame*) Experience

Yu-Yu Farm is all about horses—in fact, it is the only facility in Shizukuishi providing horse riding and trekking services. Horses were once indispensable to the agricultural communities of Iwate Prefecture, where they were used for farm work and transportation and considered to be important members of the family. Farmhouses in the Shizukuishi region were typically in the style of a *magariya*, which literally means “bent house.” A stable wing for the horses and an earthen floor work area were attached to the side of the main living area. This setup allowed farmers to easily look after their horses even during the harsh winters of the area. The heritage of care and respect for these animals lives on today at Yu-Yu Farm.

Visitors to the farm can try *yabusame*, Japanese horseback archery. The farm’s owner draws on his experience in *yabusame* competitions to help even complete beginners enjoy this ancient art of archery in which a rider mounted on a running horse shoots arrows at wooden targets. While it is thought that elite warriors were fighting with bows on horseback as early as the fourth century, *yabusame* probably originated in the sixth century as a ritual for warriors seeking good fortune. By the Kamakura period (1185–1333), it had developed into a spiritual and physical discipline for samurai and was only performed at shrines. For this reason, *yabusame* is now considered a ceremony rather than a martial art. Annual displays by skilled archers in spectacular costumes can be seen at certain times of the year at major Japanese shrines. Those who want to participate just for fun can compete with fellow enthusiasts at more casual gatherings.

It takes a little practice to learn how to shoot an arrow with the 2.2 meter bow used for *yabusame*, but with some patience, almost anyone can experience the satisfaction of shooting arrows while mounted on a moving horse. At Yu-Yu Farm, there are horses of various sizes and temperaments to suit visitors’ preferences. Beginners are restricted to a walking pace, however, as attempting *yabusame* on a galloping horse requires a considerable level of skill and horsemanship.

For those wanting to take a longer ride, Yu-Yu Farm guides will take visitors on a trek through the picturesque fields and mountains of Shizukuishi’s countryside. Young children or anyone unfamiliar with horses can still experience the fun of riding in safety, led around the farm by one of the staff. There is a large indoor riding area, so *yabusame* practice and riding lessons can take place even in wet weather.

In addition to the horses, this family-friendly venue has an array of farm animals including dogs, cats, rabbits, and chickens; there is also a play area for children. Entry to Yu-Yu Farm is free, but there is a fee for *yabusame* and the other horse-riding activities for which advance reservations are recommended.