

## **Shizukuishi and Snow Sports**

### **Shizukuishi—a Destination for All Seasons**

The town of Shizukuishi, located high in the mountains along the western border of Iwate Prefecture, offers a variety of tourist attractions throughout the year. It is perhaps best known as a mecca for snow sports, thanks to its proximity to Mt. Iwate and several other peaks, but there is certainly no shortage of activities to enjoy in the warmer months. Visitors can hike the region's trails and visit many picturesque nature spots. A variety of hot springs (*onsen*), outdoor activities, and traditional crafts attract visitors—along with locally grown farm products.

Rainbows are a frequent sight in Shizukuishi, lighting up rows of iconic cherry trees in the spring or adding color to pristine winter snowscapes as they arch over Mt. Iwate. This inspired the town's whimsical catchphrase: "Rainbows look good on Shizukuishi." Like many areas of Japan, Shizukuishi has a lovable mascot. The character Shizuku-chan, a young woman dressed in traditional attire with a wide straw hat, serves as the town's official ambassador and can be seen in various locations.

### **Snow Sports**

Skiing and snowboarding draw many visitors to Shizukuishi in the winter. There are three resorts in the area, all located on the southern base of Mount Iwate. Visitors can choose the resort that best suits the needs of their group, or try out all three if time permits. After a long, hard day on the slopes, soaking in one of the many hot springs (*onsen*) in Shizukuishi is the perfect way to relax tired muscles and refresh the spirit.

### **Shizukuishi Ski Resort**

Top-quality powder snow, activities for all, and the "ski in, ski out" convenience of being located next to Shizukuishi Prince Hotel combine to make this resort an ideal base for a wintertime stay in Shizukuishi. In 1993, it became the first place in Asia to host the Alpine Ski World Championships.

The resort features 11 ski trails with panoramic views of Mt. Iwate, including one trail that runs for 4.5 kilometers. Shizukuishi Snow Land, which offers activities like sledding and tubing, will appeal to children and the young at heart and makes the resort a good choice for families. Another notable option is "cat skiing"—a form of guided backcountry exploration where skiers are taken out beyond the usual trails to untouched snow via a truck-sized vehicle called a snowcat. Private skiing and snowboarding lessons in English can be arranged for international visitors.

Both hotel guests and day visitors can enjoy a soak at the Shizukuishi Takakura Onsen hot spring. This attractive facility offers impressive views of the area in all seasons and features a pond with colorful Japanese carp to add to the ambience. The hotel offers stargazing tours where participants ride the ropeway to see the night view from 730 meters above sea level. During the fall foliage season, it is possible to take the ropeway up to the start of a popular hiking course and go trekking on Mt. Takakura, where the ski resort is located.

**Amihari Onsen Ski Resort**

Serious skiers say that this resort has the best powder snow in the area. It is located on the slopes of Mt. Inukura in Towada-Hachimantai National Park and is surrounded by primary-growth forests. There are seven trails for all levels, the longest being 3 kilometers, as well as a ski school and a children's play area. In autumn, visitors take the chairlift to admire the colorful foliage. The Kyukamura Iwate-Amihari Onsen Hotel, conveniently located nearby, offers five different baths. Those who are not planning an overnight stay can use the Onsenkan Yakushi-no-Yu facility, which includes an outdoor bath with panoramic views from a height of 760 meters.

**Iwate Kogen Snow Park**

Iwate Kogen Snow Park is another smaller resort with a variety of slopes, a ski school, and a children's area. Of the three ski resorts in Shizukuishi, this one is particularly popular with snowboarders due to the long, smooth slopes. It also features a well-equipped mogul area and "freestyle course/snow park," where snowboarders can try tricks using the specially maintained "snow bumps." Mogul skiing is more challenging than regular downhill skiing, and Iwate Kogen Snow Park offers lessons for those who would like to attempt it, along with the usual ski and snowboard classes for beginners. Although no lodgings are available adjacent to the resort, there are a number of Japanese and Western-style options in the vicinity.