

Outdoor Activities

Shizukuishi is beautiful in any season. Spring brings delicate new green leaves and pink cherry blossoms, giving way to deeper green foliage and alpine flowers on the mountain trails around the town in summer. There are plenty of places to see colorful leaves in the autumn before the snow arrives and turns the area into a winter wonderland. The following are some options for visitors wanting to experience the great outdoors in Shizukuishi.

Campgrounds

Camping is a way to experience Shizukuishi's nature at close range. There are two well-equipped campgrounds in the town, both of which include *onsen* (hot springs). They are an economical alternative to hotels and traditional *ryokan* inns for lodging in the area.

Amihari Onsen Campground

This campground, located 770 meters above sea level, is part of the Kyukamura Iwate-Amihari Onsen Hotel complex. Campers can make use of the hotel's facilities as well as the adjacent Onsenkan Yakushi-no-Yu hot spring. Sites are divided into two categories: "woodland sites" nestled among the trees and "lawn sites" that are out in the open. Each category offers several sizes to choose from based on whether campers are bringing their own vehicle and the number of people in the group. An area for cooking and a hot water supply is available for communal use. Those who are new to camping or do not have equipment can take advantage of a convenient plan where tents are already set up and all the equipment and food is provided on arrival. The campground is next to the Amihari Forest Nature Trail, which is suitable for all ages and levels of fitness.

Shizukuishi Aneko Roadside Station (Michi-no-Eki) Campground

This spacious campsite is conveniently located next to a well-appointed *michi-no-eki* roadside station, allowing campers to make use of facilities such as the Hashiba Onsen hot spring, as well as the restaurants and shops. The campground is primarily used by people traveling by car or motorcycle, but there is also a separate section for those without private transportation. The campsites are spacious, making the facility particularly popular with families. The campground is next to a river with a safe water-play area for children, and there is plenty of room for youngsters to run around on the grass.

The word *anekko*, from which the facility takes its name, is used in local dialect to refer affectionately to a young woman. The bridge and the path connecting the roadside station to the campground feature several mosaics of *anekko* based on characters from a regional folktale about five princesses. Like many areas of Japan, Shizukuishi has a lovable mascot. The character Shizuku-chan, a young woman dressed in traditional *anekko* attire and wearing a wide straw hat, serves as the official ambassador for the area. Her image can be seen in various locations around the town.

Snowshoe Trekking

Snowshoeing is a great way to take to the trails when there is snow on the ground. People of all ages can enjoy the wintertime scenery and searching for the footprints of animals in the snow. The Amihari Forest Nature Trail is highly recommended for snowshoe trekking. Traditional oval-shaped *wakanjiki* shoes and modern snowshoes can be rented at the adjacent Amihari Visitor Center. Staff there can answer questions about the trail and about the plants and animals that can be spotted in the area. Visitors are welcome to join a scheduled tour or explore on their own, including areas of the forest that are not accessible in the snowless seasons. Koiwai Farm also offers snowshoe trekking. Experienced staff take guests up to the pristine backcountry areas surrounding the farm for snowshoeing on trails that are easy even for beginners.

Green Tourism and Agricultural Experiences

The Shizukuishi region, blessed with high-quality water and fertile soil, has a long history of farming. Rice cultivation probably started here as early as the Kofun period (ca. 250–552), and the area's agricultural and livestock industries continue to thrive in the present day. Shizukuishi welcomes visitors who would like to get to know life in rural Japan on a deeper level through farming and interacting with area residents. Depending on the season and personal interest, visitors can try their hand at activities like planting and harvesting rice, working on a vegetable farm, and caring for animals, including the cattle for which Shizukuishi is famous. Culinary experiences, such as making soba (buckwheat noodles) by hand, can also be arranged. Although it might not be possible to provide complete foreign language support, the residents of Shizukuishi who participate in green tourism programs are committed to helping all visitors make the most of their experience.