

### **Shizukuishi History and Folklore Museum**

This small but well-appointed museum featuring history, culture, and local traditions is suitable for visitors of all ages. Inside are exhibits of artifacts dating from prehistoric times, while outside is a farmhouse that is a particularly fine example of a traditional *magariya* dwelling where horses lived under the same roof as people. This practice reflected how much families relied on horses for transport and agriculture in olden times.

The oldest objects on display in the museum are stoneware items from the Paleolithic period. They were excavated from sites in the area and are thought to be more than 32,000 years old. There is also an impressive collection of artifacts from the Jomon period (10,000 BCE–300 BCE), when Japan's ancient people lived in a hunter-gatherer and fishing culture. Pottery, tools, and various kinds of crafts from this period offer a glimpse into the lives of the first farmers to settle in the region.

Other sections of the museum feature clothing, documents, tools, and everyday items from later periods up to the modern era. Of particular note is a display about the regional weaving technique known as *kikko-ori* (tortoiseshell weaving). This intricate style is used to produce fabric from locally grown hemp plants. The name is derived from the raised hexagonal pattern, resembling the shell of a tortoise, that is created when the fabric is woven. *Kikko-ori*, which is a distinctive Shizukuishi craft, was in danger of dying out in the last century, but efforts to reestablish the craft in recent decades have led to a renewed appreciation for it. Visitors can learn more about the techniques and history of specialized craft through the museum display, which includes examples of a woven undergarment called *ase-hajiki* that was made using the technique. Farmers typically wore *ase-hajiki* under their work clothes because the fabric readily absorbed sweat.

The farmhouse next to the museum is a *magariya*, which literally means “bent house.” Its L-shaped form contained a stable for horses and an earthen floor work area attached at the side of the family's main living area. Horses were considered valuable members of the family in an agricultural region like Shizukuishi, and the *magariya* design allowed farmers to care for and protect them during the harsh winters.

This well-preserved *magariya* is thought to be more than 100 years old. It has a traditional thatched roof and a sunken hearth (*irori*), which would have provided heat, light, and the means for meal preparation. The *irori* is a square stone-lined pit set into the floor; a pot or kettle could be suspended on a hook over the fire in the hearth.

The farmhouse was moved next to the museum due to changes in local land use. In the 1950s, the government promoted the building of a dam for flood control on nearby Lake Gosho. However, the 520 households that would be displaced by the project were reluctant to give up their family land; it took more than 20 years to complete negotiations before the Gosho Dam eventually opened in 1981. The farmhouse, which was among the buildings affected by the dam, was brought to the museum grounds. It is the only remaining *magariya* in Shizukuishi to have been carefully preserved in this way.

