

## Shirogane Park

Shirogane Park connects Ginzan Onsen to the shuttered mines that were once the lifeblood of the community. The park's gentle circle trail through the forested hills around Ginzan passes by several natural and historic sights.

The entrance to Shirogane Park is on the southern outskirts of town. A small water-filled cave near the entrance that was used for drainage from the mines now provides a glimpse into the area's former mining operations. From the cave, a trail leads into Senshin Gorge, passing by Shirogane Falls, a waterfall that cascades 22 meters into the basin below.

The path through the gorge passes over the Ginzan River, which is spanned by the vermillion Sekotoi Bridge and the traditional stone Kajika Bridge. Along the way, many hikers stop to rest at the Natsu Shirazu Cave, an old mining tunnel that runs deep into the mountain. Naturally cool underground air flows from the mouth of the cave.

The trail leads to Omokage-en, a small flower garden with a pond filled with colorful koi carp; just beyond is the entrance to the Nobesawa Silver Mine. Once there were 53 such mining tunnels in the mountains of Ginzan, but this is the only one still open to the public. Entering the tunnel, visitors can observe the environment in which miners worked hundreds of years ago. The 20-meter-long tunnel passes through a stone chamber with walls blackened by *yakibori* (literally "burn digging") mining.

The trail's ascent culminates in a small clearing with a statue of Giga Ichirozaemon (dates unknown), a semi-legendary figure credited with discovering the silver of the Ginzan valley. The descending path follows a ridge on the opposite side of the gorge, passing a small wooden shrine honoring the mountain deities, as well as a shrine to the deity of Shirogane Falls, before exiting back in town.

The entire trail is nearly 4 kilometers and takes about 80 minutes to complete. There are also 2- and 0.8-kilometer courses, which can be completed in about 40 and 20 minutes, respectively. Shirogane Park is known for its colorful autumn foliage. The trail is closed in winter due to heavy snowfall.