

Obanazawa: One of Japan's Snowiest Regions

Obanazawa is one of Japan's three deep-snow regions. Snow accumulates throughout the long-lasting winters in these regions to create extensive snow coverage and deep snowbanks. From November to April, Obanazawa receives nearly 10 meters of snowfall, and 1.7 meters of snow cover in an average year.

Snow is an important part of life in Obanazawa, influencing many aspects of local culture. The beauty of Obanazawa in winter is referenced in a song that accompanies the region's signature dance, the Hanagasa Odori. It is reflected in the traditional architecture of the area: houses are built with steep sloped roofs to avoid accumulation and have rooms with raised floors to avoid damage to living spaces from melting snow. Its influence can also be seen in traditional clothes, including heavy winter apparel, snowshoes, and sleds for hauling. Farmers rely on the snowmelt from the mountains to irrigate fields in the planting season, and to help sustain livestock. The harsh winters are an essential factor in producing Obanazawa Beef, the town's premium brand of wagyu. It is also key to producing an Obanazawa summer specialty: *yukigura* soba. *Yukigura* soba is made from Mogami-wase soba aged through the winter in a *yukigura*, a container which is naturally cooled by the snow, and has a richer, sweeter flavor than typical soba noodles.

There are a wide variety of outdoor sports and activities to enjoy in winter, as well as an annual snow festival, one of the community's biggest seasonal events. The snow-covered inns and lamp-lit streets of Ginzan Onsen are an iconic symbol of Japan's hot-spring bathing culture.