

Summer in Obanazawa

Obanazawa occupies a basin surrounded by mountains, which makes summers particularly hot and humid. Guests at Ginzan Onsen's traditional multistory inns stroll through its narrow streets in *yukata* (light cotton kimono) and cool off in the refreshing spray of Shirogane Falls, a short walk from the town center. Hikers stroll through the forested hills of Shirogane Park and Natagiri Pass, which hum with the cries of cicadas. Yosenji Temple commands a view of verdant rice fields, and Mt. Gassan and Mt. Chokai towering in the distance. In the early morning, local farmers harvest Obanazawa watermelons ripened in the summer sun.

Summer is also the season for the Hanagasa Festival, an annual two-day event held in August. It begins on August 27 with the Suwa Shrine Festival, when a procession of people carrying *mikoshi* (portable shrines), musicians playing traditional instruments, and dancers praying for good harvest parades through town. It continues to the next day, during which a parade of dancers performs Obanazawa's signature dance, the Hanagasa Odori, on the main avenue in the town center.