Living in a Cold Climate

Winters are long and harsh in Shikaoi, and the cold impacts many aspects of daily life. The climate may be harsh, but it also offers certain benefits. The residents of Shikaoi have learned to embrace the cold and make the most of the opportunities it presents.

Activities and events

Snow covers the ground throughout much of winter, especially in the mountains around Lake Shikaribetsu, where temperatures can reach -30 degrees Celsius. The extreme cold creates unusual ice formations and phenomena such as frost flowers, candle ice, and hoarfrost. Snowshoeing is a popular way to observe fleeting natural formations, enjoy snow-blanketed landscapes, and spot wildlife including white-tailed eagles.

The lake is also the setting for a long-running community-driven winter celebration, the Shikaribetsuko-Kotan igloo village. Each year, event organizers and volunteers build an ice village on the frozen lake, featuring attractions such as an ice bar, an ice chapel for weddings, an ice hall for concerts, ice lodges, and an open-air hot spring. Around 80 tonnes of snow and lake water is used to create the roughly 5,000 blocks of ice needed to build and maintain the village, which is in place from late January until mid-March.

Agriculture

Agriculture is a major industry in Shikaoi, and while the long winters shorten the farming season, the snow offers sustainable cool storage and natural insecticidal solutions. Farmers gather snow in insulated units for storing produce. In fact, potato farmers use these "snow warehouses" to produce special types of potatoes with elevated sweetness levels, as the cold causes the starch within the harvested potatoes to be converted into sugar. The farmers also manipulate the snow cover on their fields, partially clearing it along potato rows to expose the ground to winter's subzero temperatures. This removes the insulating effect of the snow and causes the ground and any overwintering potatoes to freeze, eliminating blight and insect eggs.