

## **Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale**

Have you ever wanted to be completely immersed in art but unconstrained by a museum? If so, we invite you to visit the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale. It's an outdoor contemporary art festival held every three years in and around Tokamachi and Tsunan. That's a total area of 760 square kilometers!

The festival explores the intersection of art, ecology, and community by bringing art into the natural world and public spaces. The site-specific installations are created to be part of the landscape itself, in harmony with nature and local communities. You'll find works of art in rice fields and alleyways, outside homes and vacant buildings, scattered through parks and gardens, and in museums like the Matsudai NOHBUTAI Field Museum and the Echigo-Tsumari Satoyama Museum of Contemporary Art (MonET).

Since the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale's inception in 2000, many permanent pieces have been installed and can be viewed year-round. During the festival, additional temporary installations are added, transforming Tokamachi into an immersive wonderland of contemporary art.

## **Honyarado**

This igloo-like snow hut is called a *honyarado*. They are constructed as part of a winter event in Tokamachi called *torioi* (bird chasing).

Traditionally held on the night of January 14, *torioi* is one of Tokamachi's agricultural traditions. Children parade through town, loudly clapping wood blocks and singing a *torioi* song to scare away crop-devouring birds. Residents reward their efforts with mochi rice cakes and other sweets. The children then gather inside a *honyarado*, where they can roast the mochi over a charcoal stove and share the fruits of their labor late into the night, enjoying the snow and time spent with friends.

If you've ever visited northern Japan in wintertime, you may have seen similar structures referred to as *kamakura*. The Tokamachi name for them likely comes from the *torioi* song, which expresses the act of shooing away birds with the onomatopoeic shout *honyara!*

## **Fluvial Terraces**

Have you seen how land on both sides of the Shinano River rises like stair steps? You might think these flat stretches are man-made, but they are actually a natural geological feature called "fluvial terraces." They're part of the reason people were attracted to this area more than 10,000 years ago.

Tokamachi lies along a major fault line. Two tectonic plates pushed against each other, causing the land to crumple up like a piece of paper. The fluvial terraces began to form some 400,000 years ago, when a channel was cut into the raised land by a river running through it. More tectonic movement continued to raise the river basin, and because water always flows to lower ground, the river shifted its course. This eroded a new

riverbed over time, leaving the flat bed of the old one behind. The process repeated several times over the millennia, creating today's terraces.

Because of them, people found the flat land they needed to settle and farm here. Even today, the flat stretches of land are filled with rice paddies and homes, while the slopes are still covered in dense forest. This is one of the best-preserved examples of fluvial terraces left in Japan.

### **Hot Springs in Matsunoyama**

Japan is a country of hot springs, full of volcanic activity and fault lines where thermal waters bubble to the surface. Each hot spring is unique, but some are more unusual than others—like the waters of Matsunoyama Onsen, a historic resort town in the mountains of Tokamachi.

The town's hot springs have been called one of Japan's "Three Great Curative Springs," and bathers have come to Matsunoyama since the fourteenth century for healing and relaxation. The waters are known for their diverse mineral content. Japanese law says that spring water needs a sufficient concentration of at least 1 out of 19 therapeutic minerals to qualify as a hot spring. Matsunoyama Onsen's springs meet the threshold for eight of these minerals, including the highest levels of antifungal and antibacterial boric acid found in Japan.

The minerals in the water are a lot more concentrated than they are in human cells. Because of this, simple osmosis helps the body absorb them. There's a saying in Japan that hot springs can heal any ill but a broken heart, so we invite you to put it to the test in Matsunoyama!

### **Sake Making**

Did you know that Niigata has more sake breweries than any other prefecture? That's because it has three important ingredients for sake making: soft water from snowmelt, plentiful rice, and long, cold winters for brewing.

Water is important because it makes up about 80 percent of the volume of sake and is used in nearly every step of the production process. Sake can be made with any clean water, but soft water—water that is low in dissolved minerals—is said to impart soft, rounded flavors. Rice is another key ingredient. Summer conditions in Niigata are ideal for growing rice, with long hours of sunlight, an average temperature around 24.5 °C, and wide temperature swings between day and night. In addition, the steady, cold temperatures of the snowy winters provide stable brewing conditions and an ample labor pool of off-season farmers.

Tokamachi is home to two historic breweries: Matsunoi Shuzo and Uonuma Shuzo, founded in 1896 and 1873 respectively. We invite you to begin or continue your exploration of Niigata sake here!