

The Village of Ashikuraji

Ashikuraji developed alongside the Tateyama faith and flourished in the Edo period (1603–1867) as the Tateyama pilgrimage gained popularity. It remains an important place for understanding the religious and cultural history of Mt. Tate.

From ascetic hamlet to temple town

Ashikuraji began as an ascetic community founded by Saeki Ariyori in the eighth century. As the number of pilgrims grew over time, it became a temple town with *shukubo* lodgings for pilgrims on or near temple grounds. Illustrated maps from the early nineteenth century show a large temple complex with separate east and west grounds connected by a main street lined with 33 pilgrim lodges. The temple was originally known as Tateyama Chuguji and became Ashikuraji Oyama Jinja in the late nineteenth century following policies introduced by the Meiji government to abolish Buddhism.

As Japan modernized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the popularity of the Tateyama faith declined, and the *shukubo* ceased to operate as lodgings. Two of the former *shukubo* are open to the public. Kyosanbo, in particular, is very well-preserved. It was built around 1820 and is set in walled grounds with a beautiful traditional garden. The rooms are furnished, and there is an altar to the deities of Mt. Tate as well as picture scrolls, including a Tateyama Mandala.

Historic sites and attractions

The Tateyama Museum of Toyama is in the center of the village and provides a detailed introduction to the history of Mt. Tate as a site of worship. Exhibitions cover the geological history of the mountain, the development of the Tateyama faith, and traditions, such as the Nunobashi Kanjoe ceremony, that continue today.

Walking among the towering ancient cedars on the grounds of Ashikuraji

Oyama Jinja Shrine provides a sense of the history and scale of the worship that developed around Mt. Tate. The various halls are dedicated to the deities believed to dwell in the mountain's peaks.

To the east of Ashikuraji Oyama Jinja is a group of sites that once belonged to Tateyama Chuguji. These include the Enmado Hall, dedicated to Enma, the Buddhist King of Hell, and the Nunobashi Bridge, which represents the bridge over the mythological Sanzu River that separates the earthly realm from the Buddhist netherworld. The Enmado contains more than 60 Buddhist statues; the collection is designated an Important Cultural Property.

Devotees of the Tateyama faith began their pilgrimages at the Enmado, symbolically crossing the Nunobashi Bridge into the afterlife. They then visited the sacred peaks of Mt. Tate to purify their souls and be spiritually reborn. At the Tateyama Mandala Yuen, an outdoor facility operated by the Tateyama Museum of Toyama, light and sound installations recreate the

pilgrimage experience and the soul's journey through the Buddhist
underworld. The Tateyama Mandala Yuen is a 10-minute walk from the
Nunobashi Bridge.