

Orataru Culture Exchange Center

1F: Tourism Information, Café, and Shop

Hours: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

A good place to begin a visit to Yamakoshi is the Orataru Cultural Exchange Center, located beside the Yamakoshi Branch Office of Nagaoka City Hall. Various pamphlets and flyers are available for free, and staff are on hand to help navigate the area and recommend sights around the mountain village. The Orataru Culture Exchange Center is also a convenient place to appreciate some of the elements that make Yamakoshi so distinct: colorful *nishikigoi* carp and the terraced rice fields and ponds in which they are traditionally raised. *Nishikigoi* with various color patterns can be seen up close in a large tank just inside, and the observation point at the rear of the center offers a sweeping view of the village's terraced slopes.

Rental bicycles are on hand, and visitors may also arrange tours or audio guides in Japanese or English for walking courses around Yamakoshi.

Contacting the facility in advance to check guide availability is recommended. Craft workshops can also be arranged, depending on the day.

The first floor has a small café, shop, and meeting space. The café menu includes simple savory options such as curry, udon noodles, and hot dogs; sweets like soft-serve ice cream and poundcake; and drinks such as coffee and tea. The shop sells local produce and wild vegetables, products made with regional specialties such as *kagura nanban* (a type of chili pepper), homemade sweets, carp-themed gifts, decorative embroidered balls (*temari*), and postcards. There are carp-themed hats and signs for those who wish to take playful photographs.

Along the staircase, marks on the walls show just how deep the snow can get during a Yamakoshi winter.

2F: Chuetsu Earthquake Memorial Museum

Hours: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The second floor of the facility is a museum with information about the 6.6-magnitude Chuetsu earthquake, which struck Nagaoka and the surrounding areas on Saturday, October 23, 2004. The earthquake caused extensive damage to buildings, infrastructure, and livelihoods across Nagaoka, and its effects can still be seen in some areas of the city today. A comprehensive audio guide in Japanese and English, which can be borrowed from the first-floor counter, tells the story.

Projection mapping illustrates the range of the earthquake's effects, and interviews with residents can be navigated via a touch panel. The videos are subtitled in various languages and help explain the disaster in full: what happened in the aftermath, how local residents were evacuated, how Yamakoshi villagers desperately tried to save their prized fighting bulls and airlift them to safety, and the steps that were taken to recover. The interviews with displaced Yamakoshi residents are particularly poignant

and show the resolute spirit of those who returned to their ancestral homes
in the aftermath, determined to keep their community alive.