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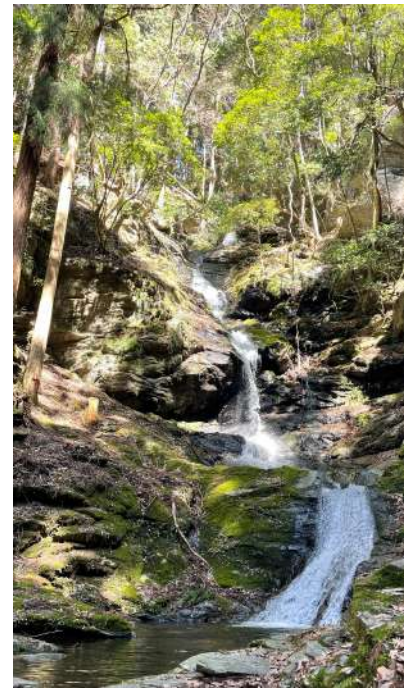
The Waters of Higashi Yoshino 水

Talking with the people living in Higashi Yoshino Village, we often heard that the best part of this village is the beauty of its waters. In this article, I would like to introduce the natural charms of this place and its waters to our "Na no Ra" readers.

Nanatakiyatsubo Falls

Higashi Yoshino Village is a village with many waterfalls. The most representative of them is Nanatakiyatsubo Falls. To go there, you first cross the suspension bridge over Shigo River, and climb up a slight slope. Then, its steadily cascading waterfalls come into view. I was left in awe of the wonderful landscape that nature had created.

This area with Nanatakiyatsubo Falls, surrounded by manmade Yoshino cedar forests, is not only one of Japan's three most beautiful manmade forests, but also has been recognized for the purity and beauty of its waters, and, was selected in 2008 as one of the "100 Famous Waters of the Heisei Era" by the Ministry of the Environment.



According to our guide, Mr. Inoue from the Higashi Yoshino Village Office Regional Development Division, there are 7 ("nana" in Japanese) waterfalls, so there are also only 7 pools. But, in accordance with the famous Japanese proverb "Fall down seven times, get up eight" (*Nanakorobi ya oki*), it has become known as Nanatakiyatsubo. Taking a few deep breaths in this serene place, my heart was soothed, and I felt refreshed. Please visit the falls if you can.

Yumebuchi

Yumebuchi is located in the sacred grounds of Niukawakami Shrine, which enshrines the goddess of water Mizuhanome. It is also the point at which three rivers (Takami River, Shigo River, and Hiura River) converge, forming a deep azure pool.

According to the *Nihon Shoki*, Emperor Jinmu visited Niukawakami to pray for victory in war. Here, legend says that he sank a sacred jar of sake in the water and watched the movements of a drunken fish, which were determined to be a sign of his victory in the battle.

Enjoying the view from the vermilion Aritooshi Bridge is nice, but you can also go down to the bank of the azure pool, so I recommend doing so in summer.



Himukashi no Taki



Near Yumebuchi, there is a waterfall that splits into two streams of water called Himukashi no Taki (literally "Eastern Waterfall") Falls. It is said that its name comes from being the place located to the east of the Yoshino Imperial Villa.

In front of the falls, there is a sacred rope (*shimenawa* in Japanese) that lends it a mystical atmosphere. It is said that a dragon god lives in the falls, so it is also called "Waterfall of the Dragon God". Contrary to the West, in East Asia, dragons are associated with water, so that is why one is thought to live in this waterfall.

Also, at Niukawakami Shrine, for a donation of 300 yen you can receive a "Dragon Ball", which is thought to remove impurities and guide the recipient to good luck. If you make a wish and blow three times into the hole in the ball, it is said that the Dragon God will grant your wish. If you visit, please try it!





Furusato Village

Welcome to Furusato Village! This facility allows you to enjoy the nature of Higashi Yoshino Village and offers many services, starting with a camping site and lodging, and including a cafeteria, onsen bathhouse, and more.

According to Facility Manager Mr. Ichikawa, it was originally established as Yahata Elementary School in 1912, but in 1989, it was reborn as "Furusato Village" and became a lodging facility. After that, Yahata Onsen was also incorporated, and became a place for leisure activities.

The Visitor Center is a renovated nostalgic school building with over 100 years of history. Inside there is a cafeteria and a place where you can look up travel information. The Furusato Hall next to the visitor center is a lodging facility that can be used by families and groups. There are both tatami rooms and Western-style rooms, as well as a lounge for chatting.

There is also a tent site located right by the bank of Shigo River where you can enjoy camping. It seemed like a place where I could have my ideal summer day, having a barbecue with friends and swimming in the river after, then lighting sparklers at night.

At Furusato Village, the cherry blossom trees in spring, cool streams in the summer, maple and ginkgo trees in the fall, and frost in the winter mean that you can enjoy its beauty across all four seasons. Plus, with easy access to famous waterfalls like Nanatakiyatsubo Falls and Uodome no Taki Falls, as well as mountains like Mt. Isetsujiyama and Mt. Kunimi, it is also a good base for hikers. It is a facility where you can enjoy a relaxing slow-paced lifestyle, so I recommend that you pay a visit here on your next trip.



Yahata Onsen

Established in 1995 and located next to the Shigo River, here you can enjoy the view of beautiful mountains and streams while taking a bath, which I think is perfect stress relief. There are maple and cherry blossom trees in the mountains, so depending on the season you can enjoy a different view.

The scent of ancient wood drifts up from the bathtub, and the natural granite rock bath is outfitted with a jet spa. The pride of Mr. Ichikawa is the cypress wood bathtub. Ancient cypress is a type of giant tree over thousands of years old which contains essential oils that are purportedly good for blood flow and metabolism. Every week on Wednesday the male and female bath areas are switched, so if you visit twice in a week, you can enjoy both areas.

I tried bathing in the rock bath. The special quality of the water in this bath is its weak alkalinity, which is gentle on the skin. I was able to really relax and enjoy the view of the valley from the onsen. It was so relaxing I did not want to get out! With its mountain streams,

waterfalls, and onsen, I was able to experience the magnificent great outdoors and felt refreshed. Why not experience the beautiful waters and nature of Higashi Yoshino Village for yourself?

Guilhem Laude



Experience the charms of a mountain village: Higashi Yoshino Village

Higashi Yoshino Village is filled with the beauty of nature, including the beautiful clear Takami River, and surrounded by mountains, starting with Mt. Takami. In this article, I will introduce the natural charms of Higashi Yoshino and the mountain lifestyle of the past to “Na no Ra” readers. How about taking a journey to one of Nara’s scenic mountain villages?

Search for mountain wildlife : Japanese Wolf Statue

What kind of wildlife do you think you can find here? If you peer into the Takami River you can see freshwater fish swimming, and if you close your eyes and listen carefully, you can hear the songs of mountain birds. However, there is one animal, the former king of this land in Higashi Yoshino, that disappeared with the passage of time: the Japanese wolf.

Higashi Yoshino is famous for being the location where the last known Japanese wolf was captured. According to a Higashi Yoshino Village Office employee, in 1899, the Chairman of the Zoological Society of London planned a zoological survey of East Asia and, in 1904, Malcom Playfair Anderson, who had just graduated from Stanford University, came to Japan as one of its researchers. After surveying central Honshu, Tohoku, and Hokkaido, Anderson arrived in Nagoya on December 29th, but, as he was only able to capture mice in his traps, he decided to conduct a survey of Nara. There he received word of many hunts in Washikaguchi (present-day Higashi Yoshino Village, Ogawa) and decided to go. On his 10th day in the village, 3 villagers brought Anderson the carcass of a wolf, and, after negotiations, sold it to him for 8 yen 50 sen (around 160,000 yen in today’s currency). They could not have known that this would be the last Japanese wolf captured in Japan.

This last Japanese wolf was a young male and is currently being stored at the Natural History Museum in London. Its size is recorded as follows: head and body at 91.4cm (35.9 in), tail at 34.0cm (13.4 in), and ears at 8.6cm (3.4 in). In addition, Anderson also recorded boars, deer, and serows during his stay.

Based on this story, in 1987, a bronze statue of a Japanese wolf created by Nara University of Education professor Tadakazu Kubota was placed here, intended as a wide-ranging symbol of both the village and its hopes for nature conservation and protection. It is a spot where you can feel the history of the Japanese wolf that once lived in harmony with the mountains. Why not pay a visit to the bronze wolf statue in Higashi Yoshino Village?



Feel the history of a mountain village:

Higashi Yoshino Village Folk Museum

Next, I visited the Folk Museum. It uses the structure of the Former Ogawa Dai-ni Elementary School built in 1874, and the cute tiled walls of the water fountain outside paired with the quaint, sturdy wooden construction left over from its time as a school leave quite the impression. This is a facility where you can learn a lot about the history and lifestyle of the villagers.

Having once been a school, the former classrooms have been repurposed as exhibition spaces, with 4 areas in total (① Climate and History of Higashi Yoshino Village, ② Forestry Work, ③ Daily Life of Old, and ④ Festivals). Out of all of the pieces on exhibit, the one I found to be the most interesting was a large mortar and pestle.



Karasu (or large mortar and pestles) are a tool used in the traditional making of mochi (rice cakes). They are operated with 2 people, with one person on the left side holding down the pedal with their foot using all their strength to raise the wooden mallet, and the other on the right side shaping the mochi with the pestle while the mallet is raised. When the first person steps off the pedal, the wooden mallet falls down, pounding the mochi.

This process was repeated to create mochi. Although with the passage of time it has become rare to see this method being used, I feel that it is an important tradition in mountain life and Japanese culture.

Enjoy mountain cuisine: Kinoko no Yakata

Our final stop was “Kinoko no Yakata”, a restaurant specializing in mushrooms. Looking at the outside, the first thing you notice is the large mushroom sign. Heading to the front, I was greeted with a big smile by Hiroyuki Oomae, the owner. First, I sat down with Mr. Oomae for an interview about the restaurant and life in Higashi Yoshino Village.



1. How many years has it been since the restaurant opened? What made you want to open a restaurant in Higashi Yoshino Village?

The previous owner ran the restaurant here for 20 years, and it’s been a year since I took over as the 2nd generation owner after him. I moved here from outside the prefecture, and previously worked in a railway-related job in Higashi Osaka, but I was interested in rural life and growing mushrooms, so I took over the restaurant from the former owner.

2. How many types of mushrooms do you have?

We have over 10 varieties including shimeji, shiitake, *hiratake* (oyster mushrooms), and *numerisugitake* (chestnut mushrooms), and all are grown here in-house.

3. Do you receive a lot of tourists? Around what time of year is the peak season?

We receive tourists from many countries. We’ve had a lot of French, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese customers, and the peak season is the cherry blossom season. We just had a French tourist at the restaurant a little while ago.

4. What kind of place is Higashi Yoshino Village to you?

It’s a place that’s rich in nature and has lots of friendly people. There are a lot of foreign residents, such as a potter from America, and one from Australia.

5. When visitors come from abroad or from other prefectures, is there anything you’d like them to know about Higashi Yoshino Village?

I would like them to know about the history of Higashi Yoshino Village, in particular about the Tenchu-gumi. The Tenchu-gumi, a group of samurai at the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate, fled from the Shogunate government and ended up in present-day Higashi Yoshino Village. There is a monument commemorating them here.

After the interview, I enjoyed the mushroom hot pot set meal. The set includes mushroom rice and 3 types of pickled mushrooms. In the hot pot, mushrooms like shiitake, shimeji, and *hiratake* were piled to the brim. Since there was no meat or tofu, I was expecting the broth to lack flavor, but I was surprised by its richness. I often make hot pots at home, so it inspired me to want to make a mushroom hot pot.

“Kinoko no Yakata”, a shop with a long history loved by customers from around the world and locals alike. Thanks to the warm hospitality of the owners, I had the feeling of being at a relative’s house and became immersed in our conversation, losing track of the time. If you come to Higashi Yoshino Village, please visit “Kinoko no Yakata” and enjoy the many delicious mountain foods that you can only find here.



Samantha Johnson

"NanoRa" is made up of articles about places in the prefecture that we, as foreign residents ourselves, visited and thought would be of interest to both visitors from overseas and the local Nara community.

We hope it will be of some interest and serve to help everyone discover the charm that Nara holds.



Guilhem Laude

The clear rivers that glisten with light filtered through deep Yoshino cedar forests, the azure pool of Yumebuchi filled with sunlight, and the white stones of the riverbank made bright from the strong rays, all of these views of Higashi Yoshino Village left a strong impression on me. I was also humbled by the kindness of the villagers, and thanks to their hospitality, I enjoyed my time in Higashi Yoshino.

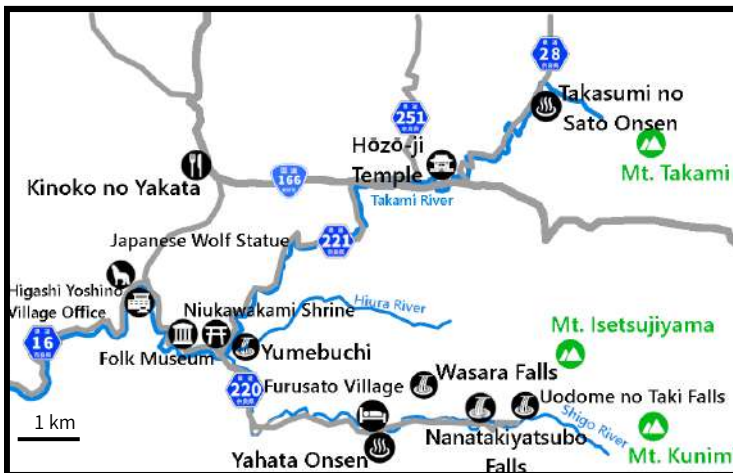
Next time, I would like to try climbing Mt. Takami, also known as the "Matterhorn of Western Japan". Why not take a stroll through Higashi Yoshino Village yourself?

Samantha Johnson

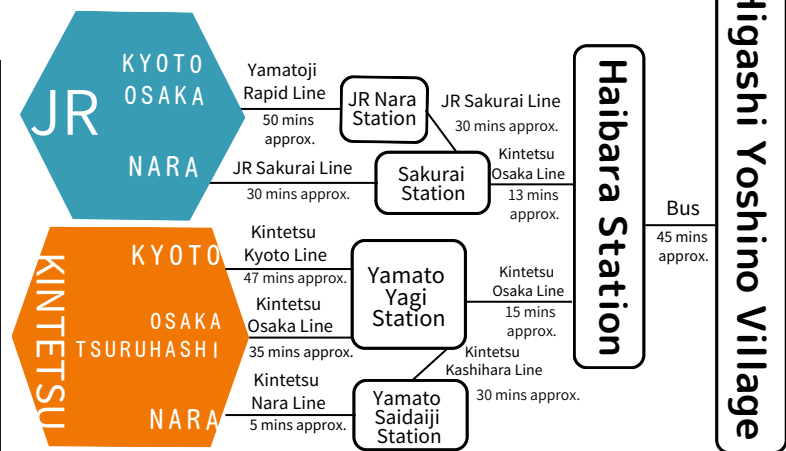
As explored in this issue, Higashi Yoshino Village has a clear identity, and the cute PR mascot of the village "Hiyoshi-chan" embodies all of the elements of this identity, including onsen, mountains, cherry blossoms, and the Japanese wolf. Born in 2013, Hiyoshi-chan continues to serve as a symbol of the village today.

To cap off your trip, why not buy a Hiyoshi-chan plushie or try out one of Higashi Yoshino Village's specialties, *taamen* noodles?

Access



By public transport



By car

from Osaka: 1 hr. 40 mins approx.
 from Kyoto: 1 hr. 50 mins approx.
 from Nara: 1 hr. 30 mins approx. } to Higashi Yoshino Village

Special Thanks

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Na no Ra

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