

Minami Shinshu & Iida City Guide Map



Tourism in Iida

Iida City, the main city of Southern Nagano Prefecture, is located in the approximate center of Japan.

It has a population of about 105,000 people, and an area of about 658 km². The city is bordered by the Southern Alps to the east and the Central Alps to the west, and straddles the Tenryu River, which flows through the middle of the city. The area at the foot of the mountains rises like steps, with a vertical rise of more than 2,700m. Ensclosed in abundant nature and beautiful scenery, its clearly distinguished four seasons make for a very livable climate.

For centuries, Iida City has thrived as a crossroads between eastern and western

Japan. A passion for research is a part of the character of the people of Iida, and they strive to preserve tradition, while also being quick to adopt new cultural aspects, which has led to a very colorful local flavor.

Recently, the city has become known for Ringo-Namiki (Apple Boulevard) in the center of downtown Iida, the beautiful river gorge of Tenryu-kyo, its unique folk culture, and the popular annual puppetry festival.





Tourism in iida



Nature

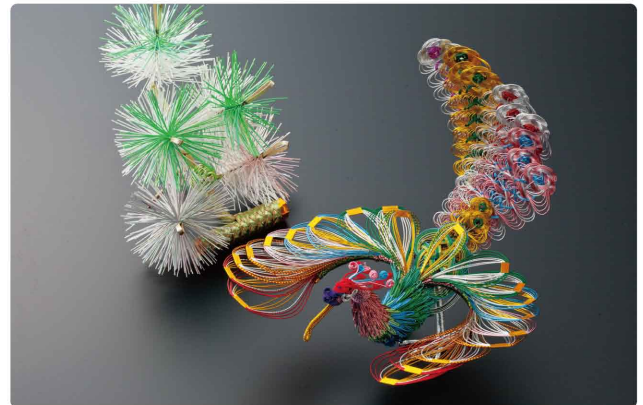
Iida City is surrounded by beautiful mountains, with the Tenryu River flowing below. Nature and the scenery are in harmony with people's lives, leaving them relaxed and replenished. Many visitors come in spring to view the stunning cherry blossoms. There are also ample opportunities to enjoy nature in such ways as river sports, hiking in the mountains, and cycling.



JR Chuo Shinkansen Line
Nagoya 27minutes iida 45minutes Tokyo

Access

Since ancient times, Iida has been an important transportation hub with many highways going through the city. Now, both the JR Iida Line and the Chuo Expressway run through Iida, linking it to Japan's major metropolises. A station for the JR Chuo Shinkansen (maglev bullet train) is set to open in Iida in 2027.



Industry

Mizuhiki (decorative cord artwork) started in the Edo Period, and is a traditional art that has been passed down through the present. Iida produces 70% of the nation's Mizuhiki. In line with the recent push into environmental projects, Iida has built a large solar electricity farm called Mega-solar Iida, and has set up bike rental initiatives.



Disposition

The people of Iida have long been attentive learners, eager to incorporate new culture and technologies. Citizens have worked hand-in-hand with the government to develop the region, with community centers playing an active role as learning hubs.



Culture

The spirit that has fostered Ningyō Joruri (traditional Japanese puppetry) and Kabuki since the Edo Period is still visible in the cultural arts today. Events like Iida Puppet Festa in August and Oketomo (festival with the orchestra), featuring professional musicians, are held annually. Iida is also the home of the traditional Japanese painter Hishida Shunso (1874~1911).



Toyama Shimotsuki Festival



Festivals in Iida

Iida City in Southern Nagano is called a “treasure-box of folk arts” because of the many old festivals they have preserved.

The Shimotsuki Kagura, which are held in the coldest months of winter (December-January) are festivals to pray for the revival of all living things. These festivals include the Toyama Shimotsuki Festival in Iida, and the Sakabe Winter Festival in Tenryu Village, which have continued for over 800 years.

In the summer month of August, Bon festivals are celebrated to welcome Shinto and Buddhism gods and the spirits of ancestors. Niino Bon Dance in Anan Town is especially famous.

These old festivals are held deep in the mountains, supported by piety and prayers of the people living in such harsh environments.

In the Edo Period (1603-1867), puppet shows and Kabuki were introduced to the Iida area, and were soon performed during local festivals. They served to help people escape from their daily lives, and gave them renewed energy.

In the Meiji Period (1868-1912), shishi-mai (lion dance) became popular. Unique shishi-mai dances were dedicated at various shrines, and have been handed down to the present day.

The largest local festival is the Oneri Festival, which is held once every 6 years. The highlights of the festival are Daimyo-gyoretsu, a reenactment of an Edo Period feudal lord’s procession, and Higashino Oshishi, a Shishi-mai dance by a giant lion more than 20 meters long.



Tokimata Floating Lantern Festival





Festivals in Iida



Oneri Festival

Held once every 6 years in downtown Iida, this is the largest festival in Southern Nagano. It features many local folk performances, with the main attractions being Daimyo Gyoretsu (a reenactment of a feudal lord's procession) and Higashino Ohshishi, a large shishi-mai lion dance.



Cherry Blossoms and Shishi-mai Dance

Southern Nagano has many beautiful cherry (sakura) trees, and is especially known for old (some over 300 years old) and elegantly-shaped cherry trees. The blossoms can be enjoyed from the end of March until the beginning of May. During this time, many shrines also host festivals featuring their shishi-mai dances.



Iida Puppet Festa

Traditional Japanese puppetry, known as Bunraku or Ningyo Joruri, has been passed down in Iida since the Edo Period (early 19th century). The Iida Puppet Festa, the largest puppetry festival in Japan, is held here every August.



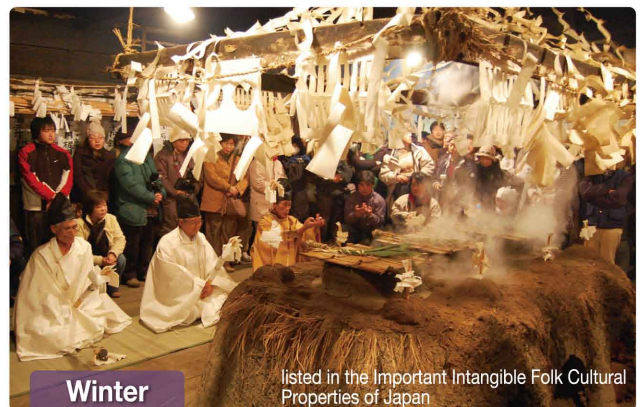
A Passion for Fireworks

Mikoshi (portable shrines) parades and fireworks displays have been prominent in the autumn festivals of Shinto shrines since the Edo Period, and are particularly loved by people in Iida. Four shrines in Iida (Imamiya, Osahime, Omiya, and Atago) have a long history, and each hold a festival with its own twist.



Yamamoto Hadaka (Naked) Festival

This autumn festival is held at Nanakuri Shrine in Yamamoto, Iida. For this festival, seven young men are chosen to represent their districts, and in a display of courage, they dance spinning barrels over their heads, under a shower of fireworks, with a thick rope around their naked waists.



Shimo-tsuki Festival of Toyama

This festival in the Toyama Valley features a vat of boiling water, a night-long dance and incantations, and calling on the gods to visit. It is said to be an extension of a rite to calm the angry spirits of the Toyama Clan, who were removed from power in 1617.