

# Toyama

Japan is considered to be three quarters mountainous, so if

somewhere is named 'wealth of mountains', you can be sure that there will be some impressive scenery. Toyama Prefecture has plenty. The Tateyama mountain range makes for a dramatic backdrop and the mountains appear to rise from the sea when viewed from the Amaharashi coast across Toyama Bay (a). The Tateyama mountains tower 3,000 metres over the bay, their beauty changing with the seasons.



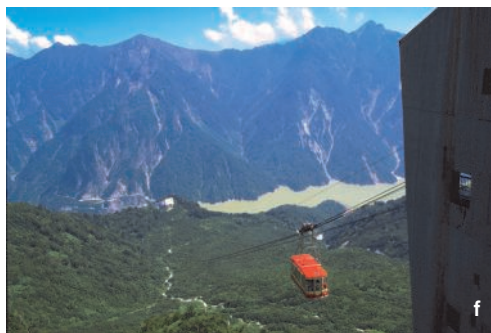
The mountains attract many visitors and the Tateyama mountains are traditionally considered to be one of Japan's three most sacred mountains—the others being Mt Fuji on the border of Shizuoka and Yamanashi Prefectures, and Hakusan, in Ishikawa Prefecture to the west of Toyama.

With mountains come valleys, and Toyama is home to the spectacular **Kurobe Gorge**, the deepest gorge in Japan. The area's tall mountains and steep valleys are surprisingly accessible today. In 1971, the **Tateyama-Kurobe-Alpine Route** was opened and it is now a popular tourist trail with its own website, [www.alpen-route.com/en/](http://www.alpen-route.com/en/), that gives a taste of the magnificent scenery that awaits.

A combination of train, bus and cable car (f) means that without great effort visitors can reach the highest of heights, such as the Murododaira plateau at 2450 metres. Visitors realise just how much snow falls in the area when travelling by bus along the Alpine Route in spring – people and buses are dwarfed by the walls of snow along the road (e). Just imagine snow opening up the road each year!

The mountain valleys have preserved some wonderful traditional culture, including the **UNESCO World Heritage Site of Gokayama**. Together with the village of Shirakawa-go in neighbouring Gifu Prefecture, Gokayama is recognised for gassho-style farmhouses (c). *Gassho-zukuri* is a traditional architectural technique which uses no nails. The buildings have three or four floors, and the charming thatched roofs are pitched at 60 degrees to prevent snow building up. Gokayama, the village of five valleys, can be accessed by a special bus from Takaoka city train station.

At the foot of the mountains towards the sea are several plains fed by clean



water from the mountains. These plains, such as the **Tonami Plain** in the western half of Toyama prefecture, excel at rice production. In early summer when the rice paddies are flooded with water, the individual farm houses appear to be thousands of small islands surrounded by water (b). The Owara Kaze-no-Bon folk festival (g) prays for a successful harvest and has become well known around Japan.

And down the rivers across the plains, we arrive back at **Toyama Bay** which has fantastic fresh seafood. The topography of the bay itself encourages an abundance and wide variety of seafood. There are said to be around 500 types of seafood living in the bay and around 200 are caught for food. Several species are only found in this area such as the broad velvet shrimp (d). Matched with excellent local rice, Toyama Bay sushi is a pride of the prefecture. See [www.toyamawan-sushi.jp/english/](http://www.toyamawan-sushi.jp/english/) for a thorough introduction to local specialities.

Let's not overlook several highly prized **traditional Toyama crafts** such as Takaoka lacquer and Takaoka copperware, and Inami woodcarving known for amazingly intricate double-sided panels known as *ranma*.

There's much to discover, and in March 2015, Toyama will become even more accessible to international visitors arriving in Tokyo, when the Hokuriku Shinkansen line becomes operational.

<http://foreign.info-toyama.com/en/>  
The official **Toyama Prefectural Tourism Association** website has good English language information with plenty of images and short videos to inspire you. It also suggests itineraries showing how you can combine a visit to Toyama as part of a wider trip through central Japan.

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