

Wonderful Winter Experiences in Southern Iwate

A Day Trip to Authentic Tohoku

The poet Basho marveled that while warriors' dreams faded into grass, the Golden Hall was miraculously left behind by the rains of time. Today, that 12th-century vision of utopia shines with renewed intensity against the winter snow. From the frozen silence of Motsuji's garden to the weight of noble robes, this journey invites you to step directly into a surviving "Pure Land" (Jodo).



Sendai Motions



Oshu City Esashi-Fujiwara Heritage Park

えさし藤原の郷

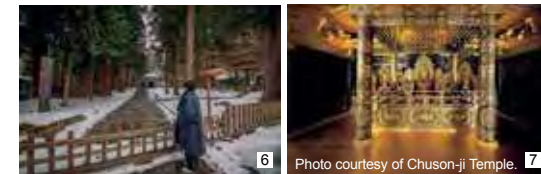
Our final stop bridges the gap between imagination and reality. This park features full-scale reconstructions of Heian architecture, used as the set for many historical dramas. Here, I step into a Kariginu—originally hunting attire that evolved into noble daily wear. My outfit is a striking red robe adorned with auspicious cranes, over pale blue trousers. It takes two people to dress me, carefully layering the heavy silk. The weight of the fabric and the sweep of the long sleeves force me to move differently—slower, more deliberately. This physical constraint offers a tangible glimpse into the actual grace and pace of the Heian nobility.

Inquiries / Contact Information

Esashi-Fujiwara Heritage Park
86-1 Konamaru, Iwayado, Esashi-ku, Oshu City, Iwate 023-1101
Tel: 0197-35-7791 (023-1101 若手奥州市江刺若谷堂字小名丸86-1)
Price: ¥1,000 per person / Kariginu Experience: 15,000 JPY
<https://www.fujiwaranosato.com/>

- ❶ Kariginu noble attire experience.
- ❷ The elegant Kyokusui no En.
- ❸ Reconstruction models of ancient Hiraizumi.
- ❹ Towering cedars along the slope.
- ❺ The golden Shakyamuni Buddha in Main Hall.
- ❻ The shelter hall protecting the Konjikido.
- ❼ The glowing interior of the Konjikido.

Mudra" (Teaching Seal). It signifies that the teaching is not a one-way lecture, but a dynamic exchange; the wisdom is directed at the listener, but also back at the Buddha himself. The abbot explains that these grounds are a Shobutsu Macho no Ba ("Place where Buddhas touch your head"), where every visitor, simply by entering, is spiritually patted and embraced by the Buddha's welcoming grace.



Deeper into the forest lies the Konjikido (Golden Hall), the only structure remaining from the 12th century. In the intentionally dim light, the hall glows with an inner radiance. Beneath the mother-of-pearl and lacquer altar lie the mummies of four generations of Fujiwara lords. Having survived the fires of 1337 that claimed many other buildings, this hall stands as a testament to the era when Hiraizumi was a major gold producer, shining independently of Kyoto. This year is particularly auspicious, marking the 900th anniversary of Chuson-ji's dedication and 15 years since its World Heritage registration. In celebration, we learn of a special upcoming event. From July 17, the temple's secret Buddha, Ichiji Kinrin Butcho Son, will be unveiled. Revered as the "Living Buddha" for its lifelike texture, it is usually hidden from the world.

Inquiries / Contact Information

Chuson-ji Temple
202 Koromonoseki, Hiraizumi, Hiraizumi-cho, Nishiiwai-gun, Iwate 029-4102
Tel: 0191-46-2211 (029-4102 若手奥西郷井部平泉町平泉衣園202)
Price: 1,000 per person <https://www.chusonji.or.jp/>



Yikai Huang 黄翊凱
Originally from Taiwan, is in his second year living in Sendai. He enjoys Japanese literature, film, mountain hikes, and wandering with a film camera.

specifically aligned so the setting sun over the mountain would create a visual manifestation of the "Pure Land" on earth. Standing here, holding a mental map of the grid-like streets that once rivaled Kyoto, we begin to see Hiraizumi not just as ruins, but as a deliberate prayer built into the very geography.

Inquiries / Contact Information

Hiraizumi World Heritage Guidance Center
108-1 Kararaku, Hiraizumi, Hiraizumi-cho, Nishiiwai-gun, Iwate 029-4102
Tel: 0191-34-7377 (029-4102 若手奥西郷井部平泉町平泉宇伽羅108-1)
Price: ¥320 per person <https://hiraizumi-whgc.jp/>



Hiraizumi Town Chuson-ji Temple

中尊寺

We drive to Chuson-ji as the snow begins to fall heavier. The approach, Tsukimizaka, is lined with towering cedars that seem to welcome pilgrims. The path is slick with snow, demanding mindful steps.

Our first stop is the Main Hall (Hondo). The principal image is a 16-foot Shakyamuni Buddha covered in gold leaf—not to boast of wealth, but to symbolize the light of the Pure Land. What makes this Buddha unique is the hand gesture, or mudra. The right hand faces outward, while the left faces inward. This is the "Dharmachakra



Hiraizumi Town Motsuji Temple

毛越寺

While the great pagodas are gone, the spirit of Motsuji remains in its "Pure Land Garden," designed to mimic Buddhist paradise. The centerpiece is the Yarimizu, the only winding stream from the Heian period remaining in Japan. Standing by the frozen pond, I imagine the Kyokusui no En (Stream Party). In days past, lords in court dress would sit here, composing poetry before a floating cup of sake reached them. This elegant tradition returns this May, marking the 40th anniversary since its modern revival.

Inquiries / Contact Information

Motsuji Temple
58 Osawa, Hiraizumi, Hiraizumi-cho, Nishiiwai-gun, Iwate 029-4102
Tel: 0191-46-2331 (029-4102 若手奥西郷井部平泉町平泉宇大沢58)
Price: ¥700 per person <https://www.motsuji.or.jp/>



Hiraizumi Town Hiraizumi World Heritage Guidance Center

平泉世界遺産ガイドセンター

Before walking the ancient grounds, we align our minds at this center built near the site of the Yanagi-no-Gosho, the former administrative heart of Hiraizumi. Inside, delicate artifacts like unglazed kaware cups offer a glimpse into the daily lives of the people who built this city. However, the true exhibit is the landscape itself. Looking out the window toward Mt. Kinkei, our guide explains a grand design: the pond at Muryoko-in was

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Discover
the Cherry Blossoms
of Tohoku!

東北の桜を楽しもう!

Hitome Senbonzakura (Ogawara, Miyagi)

Best Viewing: Early to Mid-April

Spanning approximately 8 kilometers along the Shiroishi River, these magnificent rows of cherry trees herald the arrival of spring in Tohoku. With the snow-capped Zao Mountains in the background, over a thousand trees paint the riverside in delicate shades of pink. From the blossoms reflecting in the water to the leisurely sightseeing boats and the smiles of people strolling along the

bank, the scenery shifts beautifully from dawn to dusk. This is one of Miyagi's premier spots, where you can truly feel the beginning of the "Sakura Front" as it moves north.



Michinoku Park, famous for its cherry blossoms

Located on the shores of Lake Kamafusa with views of the Zao Mountain Range, Michinoku Park is home to about 1,400 cherry trees in seven varieties. From April 4 (Sat) to May 6 (Wed / National Holiday), 2026, the "Spring Flower Festa 2026" will be held. In addition, from April 10 (Fri) to April 19 (Sun), between 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., the park plans to host an evening night cherry blossom lighting event called "Michinoku Hana-akari."



Michinoku Park | 53-9 Nihonmatsu, Ono, Kawasaki-machi, Shibata District, Miyagi Prefecture
Tel: 0224-84-5991 Web: <https://michinoku-park.info>



Entrance Fee		Operating Hours	
Adults (15 years and over)	450 yen	Regular Season (March 1 – October 31)	9:30–17:00
Children (Junior high school students and younger)	Free	Winter Season	9:30–16:00
Silver (65 years and over)	210 yen	(November 1 – End of February)	

Closed Days

- Every Tuesday (or the following weekday if Tuesday is a public holiday), and the second and third Wednesdays of December
- Year-end/New Year closure: December 29 – January 3
- Open Daily Periods: April–May, third Monday of July (Marine Day) – August 31, and October

The former Tohoku Cherry Trees at Utsunohara Park, Aomori



Funaokajoshi Park (Shibata, Miyagi)

Best Viewing: Early to Mid April

At this park, the entire hillside is transformed into a sea of pink. As you ascend toward the summit via the slope car, the view of blossoms through the windows is breath-taking. From the top, you can enjoy a panoramic spring vista that overlooks both the Shiroishi River cherry trees and the Zao Mountains. The blossoms blooming amidst the historic ruins carry a dignified air, blending festive brilliance with a quiet, noble elegance.



Kajo Park (Yamagata City, Yamagata)

Best Viewing: Early to Mid April

Developed on the former site of Yamagata Castle, Kajo Park is the city's top cherry blossom destination with around 1,500 trees. Someiyoshino cherries line the moats, softly enveloping the stone walls and white ramparts, adding spring colors to the remnants of the old fortress. At full bloom, the flowers mirror themselves on the water, while the end of the season brings "Hana ikada" (flower rafts) of petals drifting on the moat. The evening illumination reveals a mystical side of the park, distinct from its daytime charm.



Nitchu Line Cherry Blossom Path (Kitakata, Fukushima)

Best Viewing: Mid to Late April

This 3 kilometer path follows the track of the former Nitchu railway line. While traces of the old trains remain, the path is now gently draped in pale blossoms. A preserved steam locomotive adds a touch of nostalgia to the scenery. Perfectly maintained as a walkway, it is a favorite for families and photographers alike. It's a peaceful spot where time seems to slow down, reflecting the gentle spirit of Kitakata.



Yonomori Cherry Blossom Tunnel (Tomioka, Fukushima)

Best Viewing: Early to Mid April

This 2 kilometer arch of cherry blossoms serves as a symbol of spring's return and the area's resilience. At full bloom, the trees create a canopy overhead, bathed in soft light during the day. At night, the area transforms into a magical glowing tunnel. These trees, blooming alongside the region's revitalization, quietly hold the hopes and memories of the local community.



Miharu Takizakura (Miharu, Fukushima)

Best Viewing: Mid - April

Estimated to be over 1,000 years old, this "Great Weeping Cherry of Miharu" features branches that cascade in all directions like a waterfall (Takizakura literally means "Waterfall Cherry"). It possesses an overwhelming presence rarely seen in a single tree. When illuminated at night, it rises out of the darkness with an ethereal, otherworldly beauty. Counted as one of the "Three Great Cherry Trees of Japan," this legendary tree continues to enchant generations of visitors.



The Three Great Cherry Blossom Spots of Tohoku



Hirosaki Park (Hirosaki, Aomori)

Best Viewing: Mid April to Early May

Often called the best cherry blossom site in Tohoku, the park is famous for its "Hana-ikada," where the outer moat becomes completely carpeted in fallen petals, making even the falling of the blossoms a spectacular sight. With approximately 2,600 trees, the landscape—blending the castle structure with ancient trees—is both grand and elegant. Nighttime illuminations create a dreamlike world, reflecting blossoms on the water's surface. This is where the late-arriving spring of the north bursts into full, glorious bloom.



Kitakami Tenshochi (Kitakami, Iwate)

Best Viewing: Early to Late April

A 2-kilometer tunnel of cherry blossoms stretches along the Kitakami River. When the 10,000 trees are blooming in the park, visitors are enveloped in an arch of flowers swaying in the river breeze. The spacious riverside attracts many picnickers, and viewing the trees from a sightseeing horse-drawn carriage is a popular highlight. The harmony between the flowing river, the distant mountains, and the vast rows of trees creates a sense of openness and exhilaration.



Kakunodate Samurai District (Semboku, Akita)

Best Viewing: Mid to Late April

Along the streets lined with historic black-paneled fences, weeping cherry trees drape down with grace. The contrast between the historic samurai residences and the pale pink blossoms makes you feel as though you've stepped back in time. The elegant sweep of the aged branches swaying in the spring breeze is exceptional. Visitors can also enjoy the beautiful contrast with the Someiyoshino trees blooming along the Hinokinai River Bank (Hinokinaiga-ta-tsutsumi). This refined, atmospheric town offers a quintessential Japanese spring experience.

For information on cherry blossom blooming periods, please check each official website.



Zuiganji Temple National Treasure

The official name of Zuiganji Temple is "Shoto Seiryuzan Zuiganempukuzenji (松島青龍山瑞蔵門福禪寺)". This is a Zen temple of the Myoshinji school of the Rinzai sect. It is said that it began at Empukuji Temple (延福寺), the Tendai sect temple founded by "Jikaku Daishi Ennin (慈覺大師円仁)" in 828. The current building was completed by "Date Masamune (伊達政宗)" in 1609 after five years of construction.



Admission fee Prices increase from April 1, 2026. Please check the website for details.

Categories	Individuals	Groups of 30+ (Per person)	Groups of 100+ (Per person)
Adults (Including high school and college students)	JPY700	JPY650	JPY600
Children (Elementary and junior high school students)	JPY400	JPY350	JPY300

Visit time

Month	Gate Opening	Last reception	Gate Closing
From April to September	08:30 am	04:30 pm	05:00 pm
October/March	08:30 am	04:00 pm	04:30 pm
November/February	08:30 am	03:30 pm	04:00 pm
December/January	08:30 am	03:00 pm	03:30 pm

〒981-0213 91 Matsushima Aza chonai Matsushima-machi, Miyagi Pref. Tel: 022-354-2023

纏う

The One and Only Sakura Experience.

A photo experience wearing garments dyed with Hitome Senbonzakura

Wrap yourself in sakura-colored attire, colored with natural dye extracted from cherry blossom branches, for a photo experience that will become a lifelong memory.

Both traditional Japanese and Western-style attire are available. We will tailor the photo shoot to meet your specific purpose and requests.

April Limited Special Plan

We offer a photography plan at Funaokajoshi Park, selected as one of Japan's Top 100 Cherry Blossom Spots. If the timing is right, you can even have your photos taken right under the blooming cherry trees.

Please feel free to contact us.

(Inquiries / Applications): <https://machico.mu/special/detail/3066>
(U-MEDIA Inc.) mail: sakura_matou@u-media.jp

Wedding Photo Plan (Couple Plan)

Your Own Original Photo Plan (Single Plan)



Sendai City Museum Special Exhibition "I DREAM CATS COULD BE US."

What if your cat could talk like a human? Have you ever imagined that? The act of attributing human characteristics to non-human entities is called anthropomorphism (gijinka). From around 1841, the Ukiyo-e painter Utagawa Kuniyoshi began producing a series of works depicting cats as humans and actors as cats. This exhibition focuses on the charm of anthropomorphic expression in the Edo period, centering on these cat-themed works by Kuniyoshi. Along the way, it explores the secret behind the enduring, captivating appeal of Kuniyoshi's art.

Dates: April 17 (Fri) – June 7 (Sun), 2026
Hours: 9:00 AM – 4:45 PM (Last admission at 4:15 PM)
Address: 26 Kawauchi, Aoba-ku, Sendai (Site of Sendai Castle's San-no-maru Enclosure)
Closed: Mondays (Open on May 4) and May 7(Thu)
Admission: Adults: ¥1,500 (Advance ¥1,300)
High school & University students: ¥1,000
Elementary & Junior high school students: ¥800



Sakunami-an
Address: 17-1 Motoki, Sakunami, Aoba-ku, Sendai TEL:022-200-2118



Sendai City Map



The Westin Sendai Limited-Time Sakura-Colored "SAKURA High Tea"

A limited-time high tea themed around blooming spring cherry blossoms. Seven types of hors d'oeuvres are packed in a 3-tier box to give you a hanami (cherry blossom viewing) picnic feeling. Enjoy a main dish of Miyagi Kuroge Wagyu roast beef, followed by sakura-scented desserts. Celebrate spring with this exquisite high tea, complete with free-flowing drinks.

Dates: March 13 (Fri) – April 12 (Sun)
Time: 90-minute seating between 2:00 PM and 9:00 PM (Last entry at 7:30 PM) Venue: 26F Lounge & Bar Horizon Price: ¥7,000 (Includes free-flow alcohol) Contact: The Westin Sendai 022-722-1234 (Main)



Hotel Monterey Sendai Afternoon Hanami Kaiseki: Savor the Colors of Spring in Japanese Cuisine ~Haru Urara~

A monthly lunch kaiseki course that expresses the changing seasons through Japanese cuisine, featuring an abundance of seasonal ingredients. The spring menu offers a gorgeous spread inspired by hanami (cherry blossom viewing). The menu will change mid-season, splitting the event into two periods: March 5 to April 8, and April 9 to May 7. Please check the official website for menu details.

Dates: March 5 (Thu) – May 7 (Thu)
Time: 11:30 AM – 2:30 PM (Last order 2:00 PM)
Venue: 6F Japanese Restaurant Zuientei
Price: ¥7,000 Contact: Japanese Restaurant Zuientei 022-265-5504 (Hours: 11:00 AM – 8:00 PM)



Sendai Kokusai Hotel Lunch with Strawberry Dessert Wagon "GRACE" & "Delice"

Enjoy a popular lunch featuring a dessert wagon service at the restaurant L'osier D'or. "GRACE" is a 6-course half-menu where you can choose your main dish. "Delice" is a 7-course full menu allowing you to savor both fish and meat dishes. After your meal, delight in choosing gorgeous seasonal strawberry desserts from a fun, interactive wagon-style service.

Dates: Until March 31 (Tue) Time: 11:30 AM – 3:30 PM (Last order 2:30 PM) *Closed on Mondays and Thursdays
Venue: 5F Restaurant L'osier D'or
Price: "GRACE" ¥4,500 / "Delice" ¥7,500
Contact: Restaurant L'osier D'or 022-268-1101



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Illuminated Night View Heritage

Day 1: Yoimatsuri (Day Before Evening Festival)
Saturday, May 16, 2026

Day 2: Honmatsuri (Main Festival)
Sunday, May 17, 2026

42nd Sendai Aoba Festival : Special Reserved Seating Available

The Sendai Aoba Festival is a cherished traditional celebration that symbolizes Sendai, the "City of Trees." Over two vibrant days, the city comes alive with music, dance, and history.

Day 1: Yoimatsuri (Day Before Evening Festival)
Enjoy a magical nighttime atmosphere filled with traditional music and beautifully illuminated Yoiyamaboko floats.

Day 2: Honmatsuri (Main Festival)
Experience the spectacular Jidai Emaki historical procession, recreating the elegance and energy of the Edo period.

Reserved Spectator Seating
Paid reserved seating is available along Jozenji-dori Avenue, one of the festival's most popular viewing areas. Relax and enjoy premium views of the dynamic Suzume Odori (Sparrow Dance) and the Jidai Emaki procession.

Ticket Sales Begin:
April 5, 2026 (Sun) at 10:00 a.m. For details and tickets, please visit the official Sendai Aoba Festival website.

TOUR WAVE CO., LTD.

Depart from **SENDAI STATION** Limited to late March to early April

ONE DAY TRIP

Recommended tours to enjoy Miyagi's Cherry Blossoms

Limited-Time Tour: Snow Walls & Cherry Blossoms in One Day
Miyagi Zao - Snow Wall & *Thousand Cherry Blossom Viewing
April 10-13, 2026 Only Lunch Included

Cherry Blossom Viewing Day Tour to Miyagi Zao's "Snow Wall," "Hime Senbonzakura (A Thousand Cherry Blossoms at a Glance)," and "Funaoka Castle Ruins Park"

Operates with a minimum of 2 participants

Tour Price per Person
¥19,800

Includes admission fees and lunch in the tour price.

Visit the Castle of the Date Clan's Retainers, and the World-Famous Fox Village
Shiroishi Castle - Famous Cherry Blossom Spot & Fox Village

At Shiroishi Castle, you can enjoy the cherry blossoms and historical scenery, and we will also take you to the "Fox Village" where you can interact with foxes and a facility where you can see traditional Japanese dolls. "Kokeshi."

Operates with a minimum of 2 participants

Tour Price per Person
¥19,800

Facility entrance fees, ride fees, and lunch fees for plan must be paid separately on-site

One Day Trip around Tagajo, Shiogama, and Shichigahama
Beyond A Thousand Trip In A Day

Over a thousand years ago, Tagajo flourished as a base in Tohoku, Japan. This day tour takes you through the historic city of Tagajo and its surrounding areas. Enjoy a premium experience.

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Shichigahama Town Product: High-Quality Noni Seaweed

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Tour Price per Person
¥24,800

Facility entrance fees, ride fees, and lunch fees for plan must be paid separately on-site



Discover Sagae City

A quiet moment to experience a thousand years of prayer.

Jionji Temple, located in Sagae City, Yamagata Prefecture, is a historic temple dating back to the Heian period. The temple grounds are home to numerous Buddhist statues from different eras and styles, creating a special space where prayer and art come together.

- Visiting hours** 9:00-16:00 (open all year round)
 ※Regular admission includes access to the Main Hall and Yakushido Hall.
- Admission fee**
- Adults: 700 yen (600 yen for groups of 15 or more)
 - High school students: 500 yen
 - Elementary and junior high school students: 200 yen
- ※Different admission fees apply during special exhibitions.

Zuihozan Head Temple Jionji
 Address: 31, Jionji, Sagae City, Yamagata Prefecture, 990-0511
 TEL: 0237-87-3993 FAX: 0237-87-4012

ACCESS

By JR: Sendai Station (1 hour), Yamagata Station (half an hour), Sagae Station (Sato Seni is about a 3-minute walk away.)

By car: Sendai (Approximately 12 minutes (18km)), Murata JCT (Approximately 40 minutes (53km)), Sagae (Yamagata Expressway)



Visit the world-renowned "yarn and knitwear production" site. Sato Seni Factory Tour

Sato Seni is a global yarn and knitwear manufacturer based in Sagae City, Yamagata Prefecture, and has received high praise from top brands and creators both in Japan and abroad. On this factory tour, you will be able to see the manufacturing site, which is normally off-limits to the public, with commentary from Sato Seni staff.

- Price: 6,600 yen (including tax) (including tour fee, workshop fee, and lunch)
- Capacity: 2-8 people ● Duration: 180 minutes

※Please contact us if you have more than 9 people.
 ※Please note that you may share the lecture, tour, and workshop sessions with other groups.



Nationally designated important cultural property "Wooden Statue of the Twelve Divine Generals, General of the Horse"

Watch a detailed video of the experience here

Discover Sagae City



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Spring in Matsushima, one of Japan's three most scenic views, features a stunning mix of cherry blossoms and pines. Shoan is a quiet inn on a secluded cape, offering beautiful bay views from every room and colorful, artistic cuisine.

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Address: 1 Umeki, Tataru, Matsushima-machi, Miyagi-gun, Miyagi
 TEL: 022-354-3111



Sanriku Railway: Connecting the Memory of the Disaster

The Sanriku Railway Rias Line traces nearly the entire length of Iwate Prefecture's Sanriku coast, running 163 km north-south through one of Japan's most rugged landscapes. Its jagged shoreline of steep cliffs and deeply carved inlets is a place of extraordinary beauty that attracts adventurous travelers and outdoor enthusiasts, but this land has also faced nature's overwhelming power. On March 11, 2011 (3.11), it was severely impacted by the tsunami that followed the Great East Japan Earthquake, an event that profoundly altered both the landscape and the lives of its people.

Today, I'm aboard the Sanriku Railway to learn about its Shinsai Gakushu (Disaster Education) train, a program designed to recount what happened on 3.11 and ensure that lessons learned from the disaster are not forgotten. The train's local guides explain the tsunami's impact on the railway and its surroundings and share stories from their personal experience. The program also explains the long road to recovery, the decisions made in rebuilding, and the importance of disaster preparedness and risk reduction. It's popular with school groups and tour groups. Riders are encouraged to think about what they would do in a similar situation and how communities can better prepare for the future, making it a moving classroom and space to reflect.

I meet my guide, Ran Chiyokawa of the Sanriku Railway Tourism Department, at Miyako Station. Chiyokawa wanted to work in a job where she would interact with people and was especially interested in the tourism industry. Her desire to contribute to the local community led her to apply to the Sanriku Railway in 2019, where she has been able to put her passion to good use. In addition to guiding tours, she responds to traveler inquiries, assists with advertising, and develops tours. She was an elementary student when the tsunami struck,



□ A train arrives at Miyako Station. This railway, which is also a symbol of recovery, connects the area as well as travelers.
 □ Ran Chiyokawa of the Sanriku Railway shares photos and firsthand memories of the disaster. □ A seawall and the ocean beyond. The view from Shimanokoshi Station reflects everyday life as well as memories of the tsunami. □ Reflecting quietly as the Sanriku landscape passes by.

and like her, all ten guides who lead the Shinsai Gakushu tour are locals whose experiences are connected to the landscape that passes by the train windows.

Founded in 1981, The Sanriku Railway, which began operating in 1984, offers essential transportation for local residents and serves a great number of tourists. It's also known for its creative approach to tourism, operating everything from nostalgic Showa-era cars and cozy kotatsu trains, to party trains, sake tasting trains, hanami trains, and more. "The railway has an open mind when it comes to special event cars," Chiyokawa tells me. "If it's safe, we're willing to try!"

She explains that before 3.11, the railway operated separate north and south lines along the coast, with the section between Kamaishi and Miyako run by Japan Rail (JR). The tsunami caused extensive damage to both systems, after which a decision was made that would reshape the transportation network. Instead of rebuilding the JR line, the Sanriku Railway would take it over, connecting north and south into one continuous line: the Rias Line.

Rias, a loanword from Spanish, refers to the deeply indented coastlines formed by submerged river valleys that are emblematic of Iwate's coast and a key feature of the vast Sanriku Geopark. But this same geography also funnels tsunami waves, intensifying their power. In 2011, the wave recorded at over 8.5m at the shore grew even higher as it traveled inland, compounding the destruction.

Chiyokawa shares photos from the aftermath as we head north from Miyako Station: warped rails, collapsed platforms, debris piled where buildings once stood. Roads were left impassable, leaving survivors stranded

even after successful evacuations. Some sections of the Sanriku Railway, however, escaped catastrophic damage. These were repaired as quickly as possible and used as free "Disaster Recovery Support Trains," providing a vital lifeline for residents as seen in one photo of a train packed wall-to-wall with people.

Recovery came in stages. Part of the North Line reopened in 2012, followed by a section of the South Line in 2013. By 2014, both were fully operational again, and in 2019, the middle section that had formerly been JR was completed, finally uniting the route from end to end. This monumental effort was made possible through widespread domestic and international support, including substantial aid from the Kuwaiti government. As each section reopened, the Shinsai Gakushu program evolved alongside it, documenting the changes and sharing lessons learned.

We step off the train briefly at Shimanokoshi Station near the northern end of the line. The original station here was completely flattened by the tsunami. With disaster risk reduction in mind, its replacement now sits on higher ground, though the ocean is still visible beyond a massive concrete seawall. Standing here, it's impossible not to imagine the sheer force of the wave that once swept through this quiet place.

"It's important not to let the memories of the disaster fade, and for those who didn't experience it to learn from it," says Chiyokawa. Along with culture and nature, this form of disaster education naturally fits into regional tourism. This coast is stunning and honors its past. Riding this train is a powerful way to understand that and to prepare for the possibility of natural disasters in the future.

Goishi Coast Trail: A Season of Blossoms



Ofunato City, located in the southern coastal area of Iwate Prefecture, is a port town rich in nature, featuring scenic spots within the Sanriku Fukko National Park and the Goyozan Prefectural Natural Park. In the southern part of the city, the trails of the Massaki Peninsula are highly recommended during early spring, when the landscape is painted in gentle colors. Along the coastal trail, camellias bloom with the arrival of spring, and cherry blossoms can also be seen in full glory, creating a quintessential spring scene against the backdrop of the blue sea and sky. Visitors can enjoy a variety of landscapes, including "Anatoshii-iso" with its three sea caves, "Ranbouya" with its magnificent channel scenery shaped by sea erosion, "Kaminari-iwa" (Thunder Rock) which echoes with a thunder-like sound, and "Goishi-hama" where black pebbles resembling Go stones spread across the beach. By making Ofunato Onsen your destination, you can soothe your tired feet in the free footbath.

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