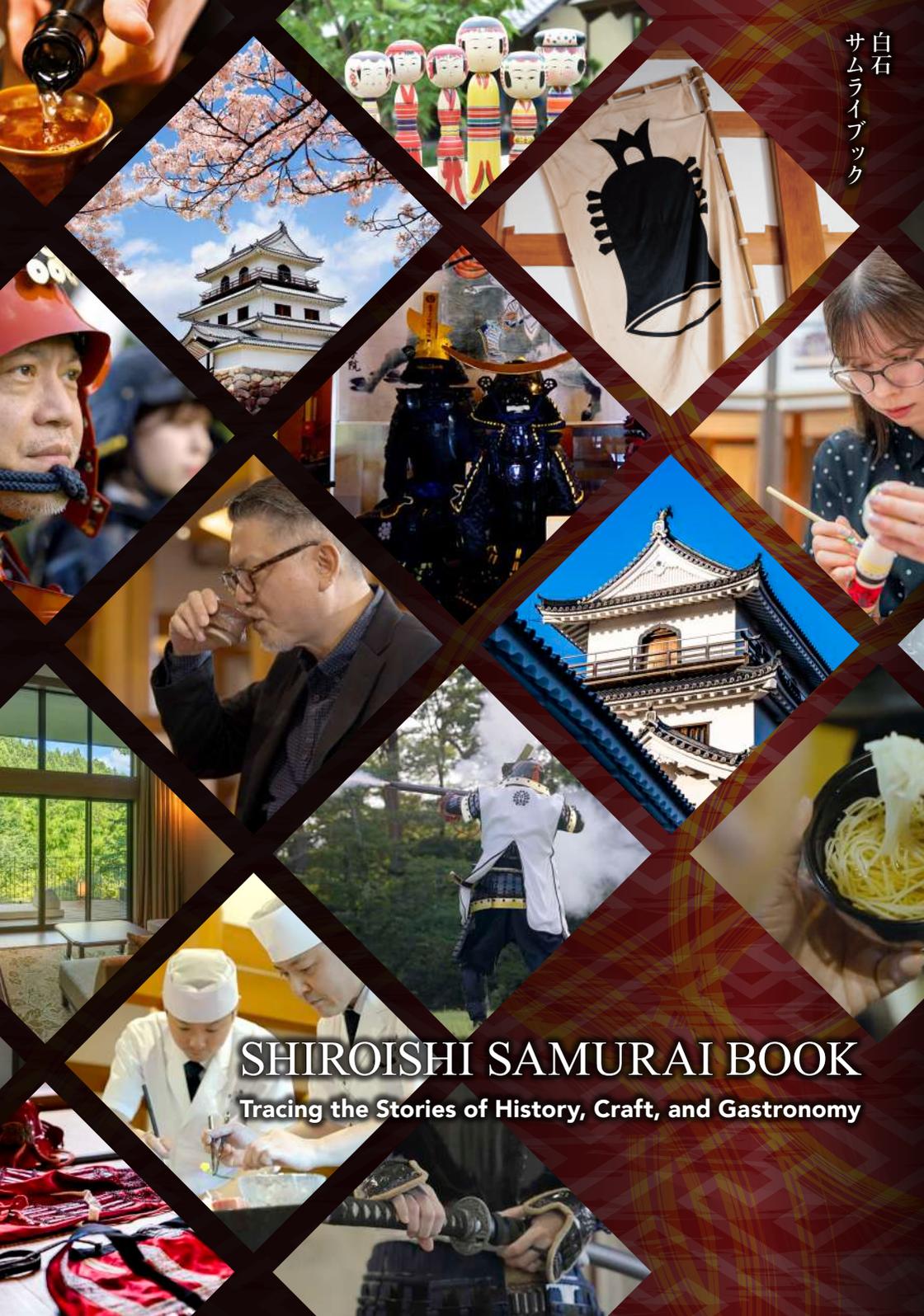


白石  
サムライブック



# SHIROISHI SAMURAI BOOK

Tracing the Stories of History, Craft, and Gastronomy



## Preface

The many treasures that remain in Shiroishi City, Miyagi Prefecture, are legacies born from the samurai culture of the 16th century. They are sources of deep pride for the people of Shiroishi, who have carefully preserved them for generations.

This guidebook shares the little-told stories of Shiroishi's samurai heritage. We hope it will inspire visitors to explore these traditions through tours and hands-on experiences, and to discover the timeless charm of Shiroishi more deeply.

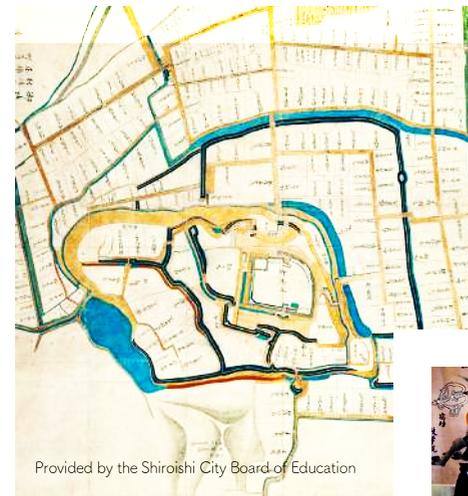


## Shiroishi : A City Forged by the Samurai

Shiroishi is located between Sendai—the largest city in the Tohoku region—and Fukushima, at the heart of a basin embraced by the Zao Mountains and the Abukuma Highlands. Thanks to this strategic position, it flourished as a key crossroads linking the Kanto and Tohoku regions throughout history.

The name “Shiroishi” first appeared in records of the 11th century, with the rise of the Shiroishi clan who once ruled the area.

In the 16th century, during Japan's turbulent Warring States period, Shiroishi Castle was constructed and became the stage for many battles. Later, Katakura Kojūrō Kagetsuna, a trusted retainer of the famed warlord Date Masamune, became lord of the castle. For more than 260 years thereafter, the Katakura family governed Shiroishi, developing it into a vital castle town that protected the southern frontier of Oshu (Tohoku region).



Provided by the Shiroishi City Board of Education



# Shiroishi Castle

## : Reborn Through the Spirit of Its Citizens

Shiroishi Castle was demolished in the 19th century under the government's "Castle Abolition Decree." Yet in 1987, the broadcast of the NHK historical drama *Dokuganryu Masamune*, starring actor Ken Watanabe, sparked a surge of enthusiasm for its reconstruction.

To faithfully reconstruct the castle, archaeologists carried out excavations, geologists conducted surveys, and historians studied original records. Materials were carefully selected from across Japan—stone from the Shiroishi area, timber from Aomori and Nara, roof tiles from Gifu, and ornamental fittings from Kyoto. Skilled craftsmen employed traditional techniques to recreate the stone walls, wooden structures, and earthen fortifications.

Such a large-scale project required significant funding. Part of the cost was covered through community campaigns such as the heartfelt "One Roof Tile Campaign," which, in the end, raised more than 100 million yen in donations. After 120 years, Shiroishi Castle was reconstructed in 1995 as the proud symbol of the city.

Today, only five castles in Japan have been authentically reconstructed in wood. Shiroishi Castle is one of these rare cultural treasures, standing as a testament to both tradition and the enduring support of its people.

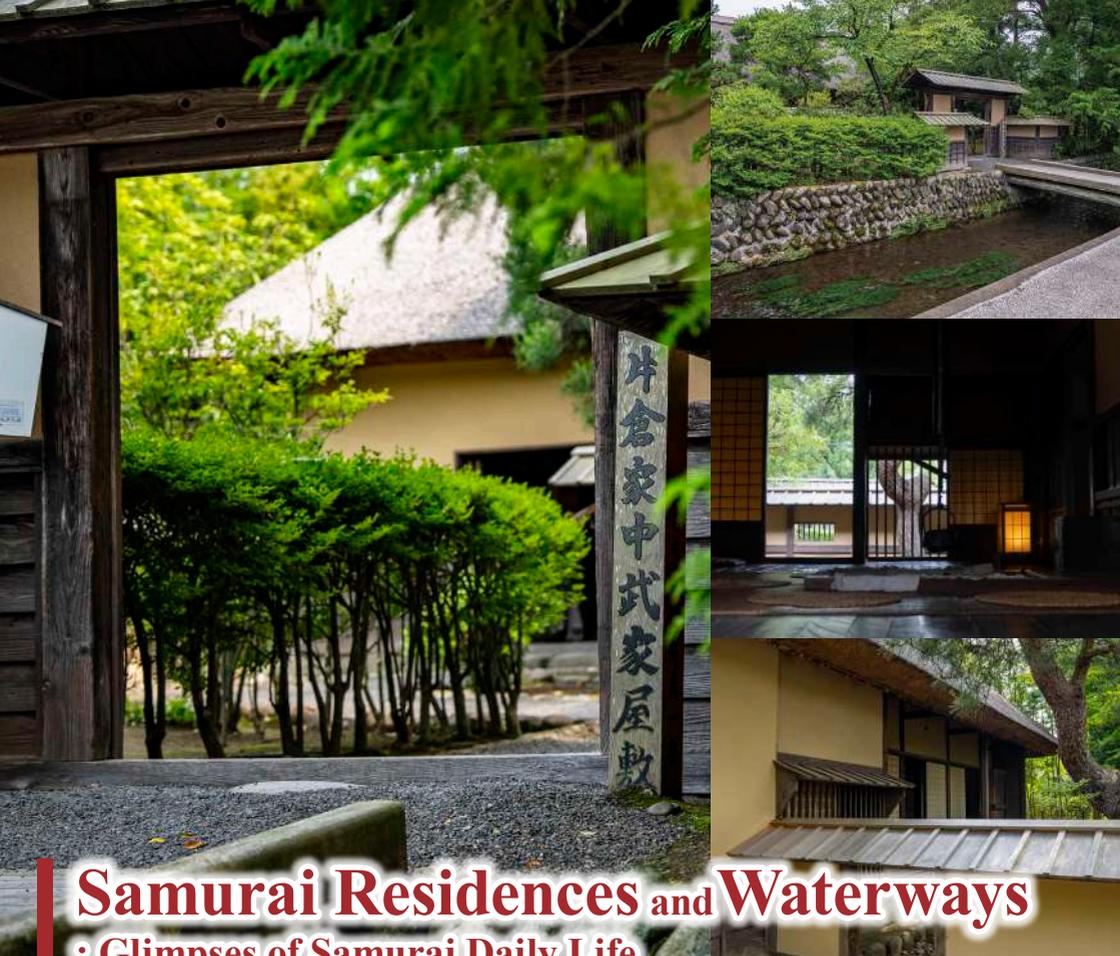
## Shiroishi Castle

### : A Rare Exception to the "One Castle per Province" Rule

Surprisingly, Shiroishi Castle was not originally built by the Date clan, but by the Gamo family, who were granted the land by the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Later, under Katakura Kojūrō Kagetsuna, the castle underwent major renovations, laying the foundation for today's castle town. For more than 260 years, the castle remained the seat of the Katakura family.

Although the Tokugawa shogunate's "One Castle per Province" decree should have sealed Shiroishi Castle's fate, it was spared. Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu is said to have held Katakura Kojūrō in high esteem and granted the castle a rare exemption.





## Samurai Residences and Waterways : Glimpses of Samurai Daily Life

When Shiroishi's castle town was laid out, the streets were arranged to soften the winds blowing down from the castle hill, while water was channeled from the Shiroishi River into moats and waterways. This ingenious use of nature is still evident today, as clear streams continue to flow through the city.

Along the Sawabata River—one such waterway—once stood the homes of middle-ranking retainers. One of these, the former Koseki residence, has survived for over 300 years and is now known as the Katakura Clan Samurai Residence. Its simple, timeworn design follows the "hiroma-gata sanma-dori" layout, with a main guest room, storage room, and family sitting room. It beautifully illustrates the architectural transition from farmhouse-style dwellings to more refined samurai residences.



## Shiroishi Umen : A 400-Year-Old Local Specialty Praised by the Samurai

Blessed with the clear waters of the Shiroishi River, fed by the Zao Mountains, Shiroishi once thrived with flour mills powered by waterwheels, producing fine wheat flour.

Nearly 400 years ago, a young man named Suzuki Miemon, who lived in the castle town of Shiroishi, worried deeply about his father, who suffered from a stomach illness and could not eat for days. One day, he learned from a traveling monk how to make noodles using only pure water and wheat flour—without a drop of oil. When he prepared these noodles for his father, the illness gradually healed. The story of this filial devotion reached Lord Katakura Kojūrō, the castle lord. Moved by the young man's compassion, he named the noodles umen, meaning "warm noodles," as a tribute to the kindness of the people of Michinoku (Part of the Tohoku region).

Made simply with flour, salt, and water, Shiroishi Umen is a type of somen. Because no oil is used, the noodles cannot be stretched long; instead, they are cut into their distinctive short length of about 9 centimeters. This unique form and its healthy, light taste have been loved for generations.





## Shiroishi Washi : A Craft Encouraged by Date Masamune

The terrain of Shiroishi consists of volcanic ash soil and many slopes—conditions unsuitable for rice cultivation but ideal for growing paper mulberry, the raw material of washi (Japanese paper). The area is also blessed with abundant natural springs, which still supply tap water in certain districts today. In addition, the cold “Zao Oroshi” winds created a climate perfectly suited for drying paper.

In the 17th century, Date Masamune, lord of the Sendai domain, encouraged papermaking here. Shiroishi soon flourished as a major center, praised as “the finest in both quality and quantity.” During the Edo period, Shiroishi washi was presented as a prized specialty to both the shogunate and the Imperial Court.

Renowned for its strength and durability, it was also used for paper garments, including robes worn by monks at Todaiji Temple’s Shunie ceremony. Today, items such as business card holders and wallets are made from it, but with only a handful of artisans remaining, passing on these traditional skills is now an urgent challenge.



## Kokeshi : A Traditional Craft Born from Hot Spring Culture

In the 19th century, farmers in the Tohoku region would take extended stays at hot spring resorts to recover from the fatigue of agricultural labor through toji (therapeutic bathing). Kokeshi dolls were created as wooden toys and souvenirs for these spa-goers.

Made from well-dried wood, the dolls are shaped on a lathe by turning and shaving the wood, then finished with hand-painted designs and a wax coating. Today, there are 11 recognized styles of traditional kokeshi, one of which—Yajiro kokeshi—originated in Shiroishi.

The most distinctive features of Yajiro kokeshi are their large heads and the vivid double or triple concentric ring patterns painted on the crown. Miyagi’s traditional kokeshi have been designated as an official “Traditional Craft of Japan,” and artisans with outstanding skill and experience can qualify as “Masters of Traditional Craft” by passing a certification exam. As of February 2025, there are 12 certified masters of Miyagi-style kokeshi, with four based in Shiroishi.





## **Kamasaki Onsen** : A 600-Year-Old “Healing Hot Spring of Oshu”

At the foot of the Zao Mountains, Shiroishi is blessed with volcanic terrain and abundant groundwater, giving rise to several hot spring resorts. Among them, the most celebrated is Kamasaki Onsen, known as the “Healing Hot Spring of Oshu.”

Famed as “Kamasaki for wounds,” the hot spring was praised for its healing effects on cuts and injuries. Historical records note that Date Masamune and Katakura Kojūrō also bathed here, and documents preserved by the Ichijo family, the innkeepers of the spring, show that successive lords of the Sendai domain visited for their go-nyuto (official bathing).

The history of Kamasaki Onsen stretches back to the 15th century, when villagers digging in the mountains accidentally struck a spring. Because it was unearthed with the tip (saki) of a sickle (kama), the place was named “Kamasaki Onsen.” A century later, an ancestor of the Ichijo family, arriving from Kyoto, praised the spring as being “on par with Arima Onsen.” He invested his own resources to begin managing the hot spring, laying the foundation for today’s renowned ryokan, Yumoto Ichijo.



## **THE YUKAWA** : A New Chapter from Yumoto Ichijo

In 2025, along the banks of the Yukawa River—nestled in lush forests near Kamasaki Onsen—Yumoto Ichijo opened a new-generation luxury ryokan, THE YUKAWA. This new stage blends 500 years of heartfelt hospitality with contemporary sensibilities.

True to its name, the Yukawa River carries the purifying energy of “yu” (hot spring water), with a constant flow of revitalizing ki. Surrounded by this pristine energy, guests will feel both mind and body cleansed with every deep breath.

All guest rooms at THE YUKAWA are suites with river-view terraces. Open the windows to welcome in the forest breeze, or step out onto the terrace for an immersive sense of being enveloped by the woods. Here, guests can experience a retreat that unites timeless tradition with modern luxury, offering moments of profound renewal.



## The Only Castle Tower Dining Experience in Eastern Japan

In Japan, opportunities to dine inside a castle are exceedingly rare—and in Eastern Japan, only Shiroishi Castle offers this privilege. This luxury plan invites you to enjoy a private dinner in the illuminated keep of Shiroishi Castle, paired with an overnight stay at THE YUKAWA, the most exclusive ryokan of Kamasaki Onsen.

The entire keep is reserved for your group, where the head chef of THE YUKAWA prepares a special menu using the finest seasonal ingredients from Miyagi and Tohoku. As you savor each dish, enjoy the soulful sounds of live Tsugaru shamisen and take in the sweeping night views from the tower. THE YUKAWA, an evolution of the 500-year legacy of Yumoto Ichijo, offers suites with private open-air baths for an indulgent stay.

For details, please see the QR code.



For details, please see the QR code.



This plan offers exclusive access to the 300-year-old Katakura Clan Samurai Residence, where Shiroishi Umen Yamabuki-tei presents a special premium course featuring Shiroishi Umen noodles. Shiroishi Umen Yamabuki-tei has a proven record of hosting passengers from JR East's luxury sightseeing train, Train Suite Shiki-shima.

Savor the finest hand-stretched umen paired with specially crafted broths and soups, along with a variety of creative arrangements. The course also includes seasonal ingredients from Zao and refreshing juices made with local fruits and pure spring water—an indulgent dining experience.

This historic samurai residence also appeared in JR East's "Otona no Kyujitsu Club" campaign posters, starring actress Sayuri Yoshinaga. For details, please see the QR code.



## A Shiroishi Umen Lunch in a Historic Samurai Residence





## Experience the Craftsmanship of a Certified Master of Traditional Craft

Visit Shiroishi's Yajiro Kokeshi Village for a hands-on cultural experience guided by a certified Master of Traditional Craft. Learn about the origins of kokeshi, the distinctive traits of each style, and tips for appreciation.

Observe artisans at work in the studio, watch live demonstrations of traditional techniques, and try part of the production process yourself. Finally, under the direct guidance of a master, create your very own kokeshi doll—one-of-a-kind keepsake to take home. This is a special experience found only in Shiroishi.

For details, please see the QR code.



For details, please see the QR code.



This two-night, three-day luxury tour showcases the samurai heritage that lives on in Shiroishi, blending deep cultural immersion with the finest hospitality.

The experience begins with a samurai-style welcome, followed by exclusive cultural encounters: a private gourmet dinner inside Shiroishi Castle, a premium Shiroishi Umen lunch in a samurai residence, and a hands-on kokeshi workshop with a master craftsman.

Tour-only highlights include a matchlock gun salute by the Katakura Gun Corps and a sake brewery tour with tastings at Zao Sake Brewery. Each moment of the journey invites you deeper into the legacy of samurai culture.



## The Only Premium Samurai Cultural Experience in Eastern Japan





春  
Spring

Skunk cabbages bloom in late March in the "Mizubasho Forest," heralding the arrival of spring. Shiroishi Castle and the Sakura-no-Komichi Park reach their peak in early April.

夏  
Summer

While the Shiroishi Basin can be hot and humid, Mount Fubosan (1,705m) offers refreshing air and alpine flowers.

秋  
Autumn

With its abundant broadleaf forests, the mountains of Minami-Zao blaze with brilliant autumn colors. City spots like Hekigyokukei Gorge and tree-lined streets also turn vivid from October to November.

冬  
Winter

Heavy snowfall blankets the mountains, and visitors can enjoy winter sports at Shiroishi Ski Resort. On clear days, the crisp air reveals views stretching to the Pacific Ocean, while migratory swans gather at Magonuma Pond to spend the winter.

## The Seasonal Beauty of the Zao Mountains

The Zao range, with its hot springs, crystal-clear springs, volcanic landscapes of basalt and andesite, and peaks rising between 1,000 and 1,800 meters, offers breathtaking scenery throughout the year.

Shiroishi lies on the southern foothills (Minami-Zao), where dramatic seasonal changes can be enjoyed.



## Local Specialties Nurtured by the Waters of Zao

The abundant spring water flowing from the Zao Mountains has given rise to a wealth of local specialties:



### Sasanishiki Rice

A premium rice variety born in Miyagi Prefecture. Once praised as “Koshihikari of the West, Sasanishiki of the East,” it was a leading brand of eastern Japan. Shiroishi-grown Sasanishiki, nourished by Zao’s pristine waters and dedicated farmers, was awarded “Best in Flavor in Japan” in 1989. After the devastating cold damage of 1993, cultivation decreased, and it is now a rare, sought-after brand.

### Zao Sake Brewery

Founded in 1873, this is Shiroishi’s only sake brewery. Using pure subterranean water drawn from 50 meters below the brewery grounds and mainly Shiroishi-grown sake rice, it has won numerous gold medals at the National Sake Appraisal—ranking among the top breweries in Japan.

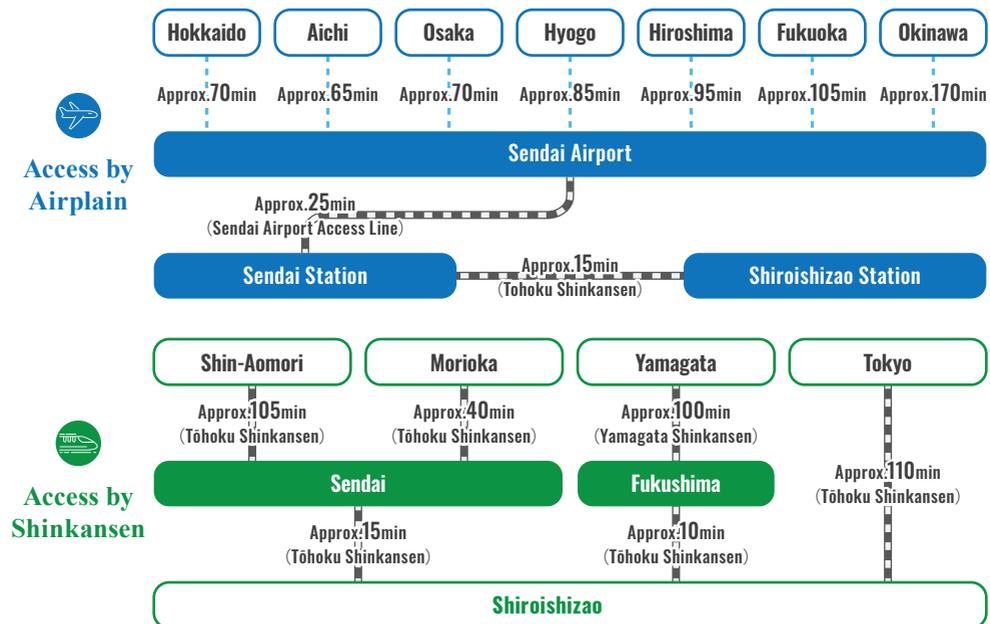
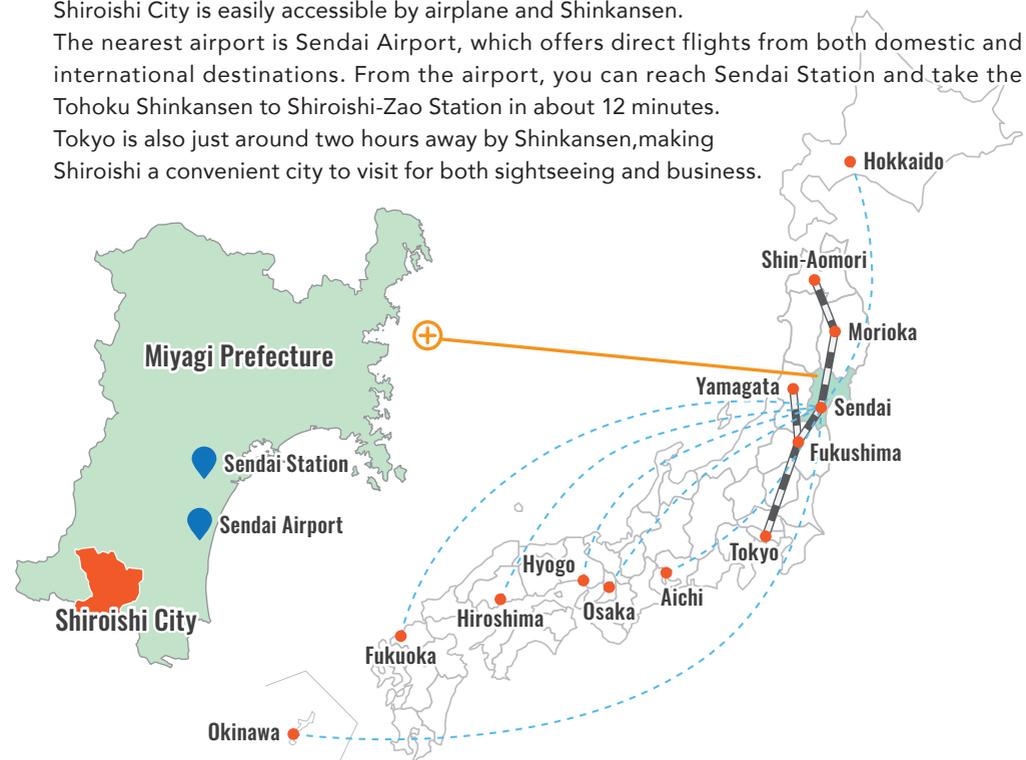


### Takettori Eggs

A renowned egg brand of Miyagi. Subterranean water from a Shiroishi River tributary is purified with bamboo charcoal and used for drinking and cleaning water for the chickens. Bamboo charcoal is also added to their feed, resulting in eggs free from unwanted odors.

## Access to Shiroishi City

Shiroishi City is easily accessible by airplane and Shinkansen. The nearest airport is Sendai Airport, which offers direct flights from both domestic and international destinations. From the airport, you can reach Sendai Station and take the Tohoku Shinkansen to Shiroishi-Zao Station in about 12 minutes. Tokyo is also just around two hours away by Shinkansen, making Shiroishi a convenient city to visit for both sightseeing and business.





For more details, please visit the official website.



<https://premium-shiroishi-japan.com/en/>

