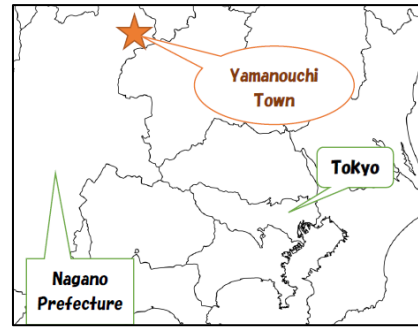


“Snow Monsters” and “Snow Monkeys”

(Yamanouchi Town, Nagano Prefecture)

---Two great attractions of a snow resort---



Snow and fantasy go well together. A panoramic silvery scene entices people into the unreal. Maybe for that reason, for skiers and non-skiers alike, the term “powder snow” has an appealing ring to it. Although there are not so many powder-snow ski resorts in Japan, one of the most famous on the main island of Honshu is Shiga Highland in Yamanouchi Town, Nagano Prefecture, which is also well known for having been a venue for alpine events during the Nagano Winter Olympics in 1998. Hearing that this ideal ski resort has tourist attractions enabling not only ski enthusiasts but everyone to enjoy a world of fantasy, I set off to report on it, armed not with a pair of skis but with a drone.



Yokoteyama-Shibutoge ski ground as seen from above by a drone

*Drone video of the Yokoteyama-Shibutoge ski ground: <https://youtu.be/-RpELDimTtg>

The highest full-fledged ski ground in Japan

At Shiga Highland, which boasts wonderful powder snow, the Yokoteyama-Shibutoge ski ground is the highest in Japan with a permanent seated lift, its summit rising 2,307 meters above sea level. This ski ground is popular not only for its powder snow but also for the dreamlike view from the top taking in the Japanese Alps, Mount Fuji,



and even, on a clear day, as far away as the Skytree tower in Tokyo.



Since the lift can only be used for going upward in winter, a tour has been arranged to enable non-skiers to enjoy the breathtaking view as well. Participants take the lift up to the summit and then descend by snowmobile. As a result, anyone can go up to the 2,307-meter-high summit and enjoy the 360-degree panorama.



*Drone video of Toshihiro Kaiwa, a former world cup skier: <https://youtu.be/J1EjRpE7SXg>

“Snow monsters”



“Snow monsters” near the summit of Yokoteyama

The splendid view from the summit is not the only tourist attraction on Yokoteyama. Temperatures on the summit of the mountain in winter plunge to below -15 degrees Celsius, which causes supercooled tiny drops of water in the air to cling to trees and freeze, creating the wonderful phenomenon of frost trees. The towering trees lining the ski slope are covered in pure white costumes, and their strange shapes make them look just like white monsters. Indeed, in recent years, befitting a ski resort that kindles fantasy, people have come to describe them as just so---“snow monsters.”

“Snow monsters” video: <https://youtu.be/PiZ0cQo796s>

Hot springs amid the snowy scenery to soothe the body and soul

There are many hot-spring lodgings in Shiga Highland's Yamanouchi Town to soothe bodies aching from skiing. Many tourists also come here not for the skiing but to rest themselves physically and spiritually from everyday stress by soaking in the hot springs in the area and strolling around the hot-spring town.

In this district, where the outside temperature plunges below -10 degrees Celsius, there are also public hot-spring baths that the locals use every day and that visitors staying in lodgings in the town can sometimes enter as well. It's fun to go out of your ryokan or hotel to take a dip in a public bath and experience the ordinary life of the townspeople.



Rooftop outdoor hot spring at the Biyunoyado ryokan in Yudanaka Onsen



Public bath at Yudanaka Onsen

"Snow Monkeys"

In this area, it is not only human beings who soothe their bodies in hot springs to escape the severe cold of winter. Deeper in the mountains, away from the peopled community of Yamanouchi Town, there is a facility called the Wild Snow Monkey Park where visitors can observe Japanese macaques in almost natural conditions. The Japanese macaques that gather here live



amid the nature of the mountains, within a radius of a few kilometers. But they flock to this park to obtain the feed that the facility distributes to them in a planned manner. Since the park's opening in 1964, the Japanese macaques have been well cared for, so they are not afraid of humans

at all. Accordingly, as long as visitors do not break the rules, such as by staring hard into a monkey's eyes, touching them, frightening them, or giving them food, the monkeys will not be hostile. So every year not only researchers and photographers but also tourists from around the world come in droves to this place where the fascinating ecology of wild Japanese macaques can be observed at close hand.



Tourists wait for a good opportunity to photograph the snow monkeys in their hot spring.

*Video of snow monkeys: <https://youtu.be/oXbvlkh1S2E>

In winter especially, the monkeys, their heads covered in caps of snow, soak in the natural hot-spring bath at the Wild Snow Monkey Park to get some respite from the cold. It is a really cute and heart-warming sight, and many foreign tourists from around the world come here to see it. When I saw the long line of foreign tourists heading toward the park, a walk of about 30 minutes from the car park along a snowy road in freezing conditions, I realized just how popular the “snow monkeys” soaking in the hot-spring bath are.



Shiga Highland in Nagano Prefecture is a ski resort with marvelous powder snow. In addition, as introduced above, the district has two other fantastic attractions befitting a snowy region---the “snow monsters” atop Yokoteyama mountain and the “snow



monkeys” at the Wild Snow Monkey Park. Highly recommended not only for skiers but also for people who just want to enjoy these snow fantasies and soak in a hot spring!

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