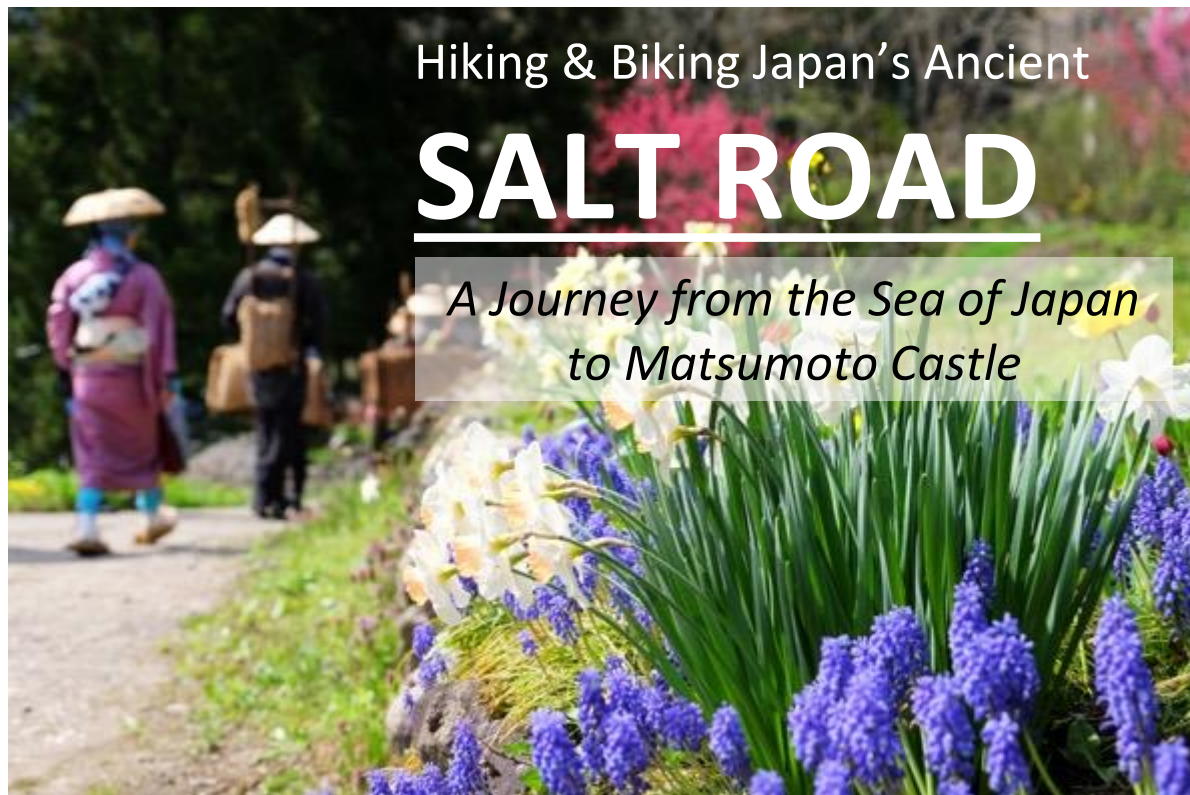


Shionomichi 3-Night / 4-Day Small Group Tour



**Images courtesy of Paul Deckret*

The *Shionomichi*, or Salt Road, is an ancient 120-kilometer-long trade route connecting the Sea of Japan to the landlocked castle town of Matsumoto via rugged mountain passes and small farming hamlets in the shadow of the Japanese Alps. Come explore this fantastic, off-the-beaten-path destination on foot and by bike, and experience the incredible scenery, rich history, and authentic rural charm of the Japanese countryside with local guides who are knowledgeable and passionate about the trail and the communities along it.

GoNAGANO

Highlights:

- Traveling an undiscovered historic trail from start to finish
- Visiting an area still untouched by tourism
- Dinner & sake tasting at an award-winning sake brewery
- Staying in traditional family-run guesthouses in countryside communities
- Hand rolling *sasazushi* – a delicious & colorful regional specialty food
- Picturesque train rides past rivers, rice fields, and towering mountains
- Relaxing in natural hot spring baths after hiking

Location: Chubu Region: Southwest Niigata to Central Nagano

Main Activities: Hiking, e-Biking

Difficulty: **Moderate** +1,000m / 3,280ft elevation gain, 25kms / 15.5 miles hiking over 2 days on a combination of country roads and forest trails, followed by 1 day of e-biking on paved roads +650m / 2,133ft elevation gain, 51kms / 32 miles (6.5 hours per day avg.)

Season: May to October

Pax: Minimum 4 Maximum 10

Price (net): Please ask

Departures: *On request basis. Requires booking at least 2 months in advance to secure accommodation and guides.

Inquiries: Nagano Tourism Organization
Tel: +81 26-219-5274
Email: naganotoc@nagano-tabi.net (Contact: Nagano Travel Operation Center)

[Tour Location / Access Map](#)

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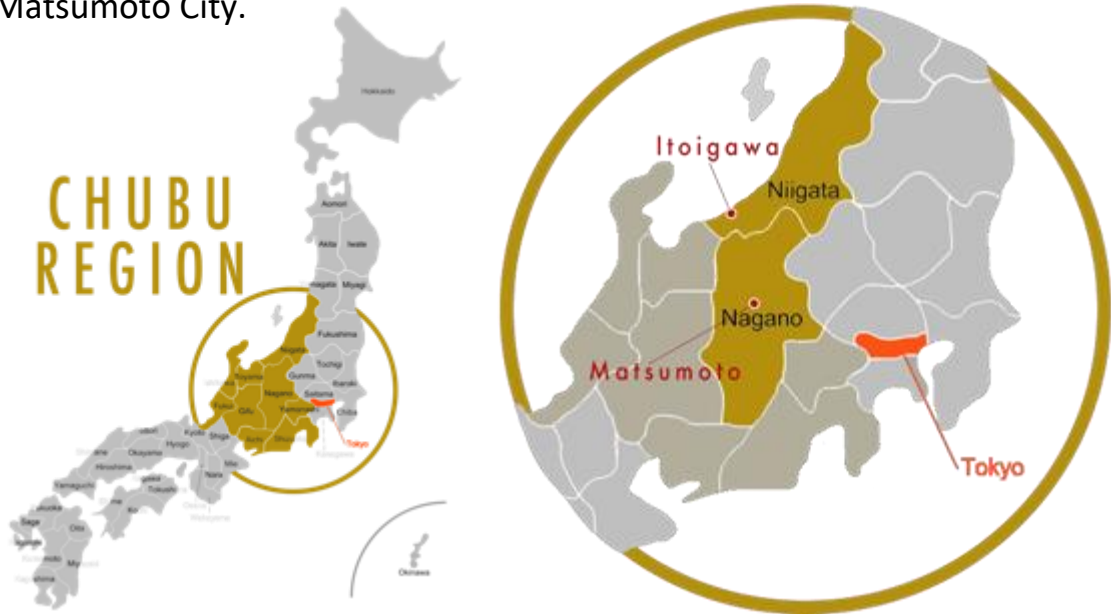
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Tour Location:

The tour takes place in Japan’s central “Chubu” region, starting in Niigata Prefecture’s Itoigawa City, and finishing in Nagano Prefecture’s Matsumoto City.



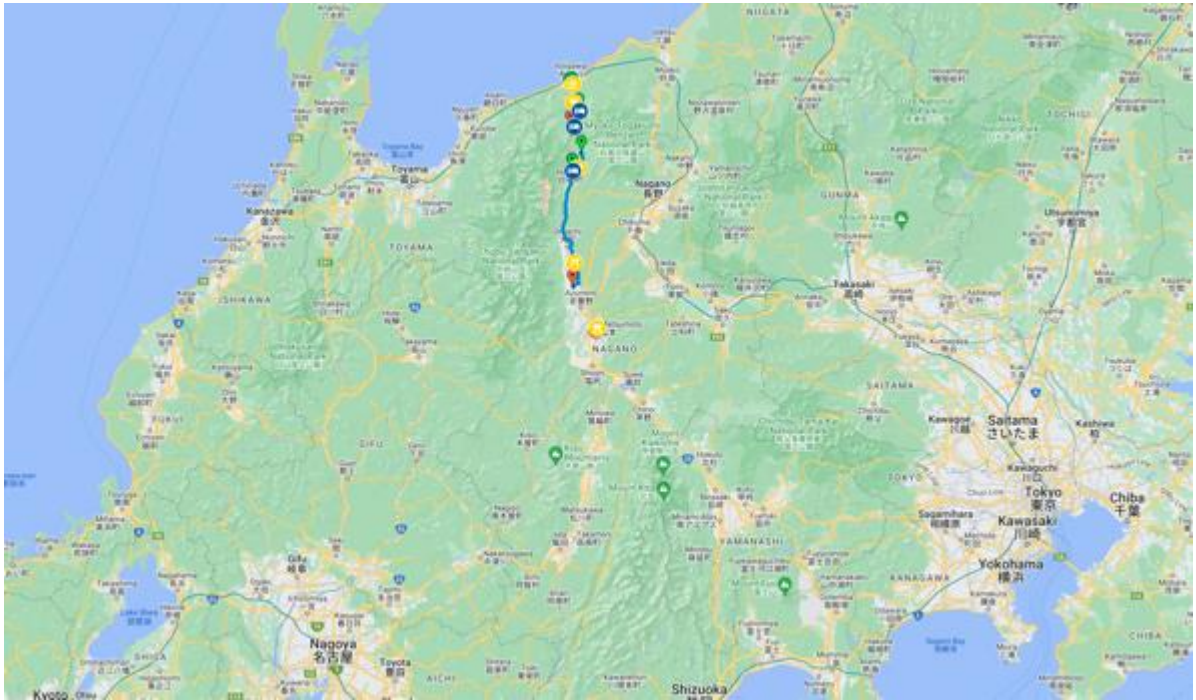
Access Map:

The Hokuriku Shinkansen (bullet train) reaches Itoigawa Station in around two hours from the Tokyo area and is the most direct and convenient way to access the starting point of the tour. (Not included in the tour price but can be arranged upon request.)



Tour Map:

Click the link to view tour accommodations and locations on Google Maps
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1ajk9nFMHXXNWfnGJoZwCdQZSON00Vdo&usp=sharing>



Activity Info:

Shionomichi Tour Activity (Hiking & e-Biking) Distances & Duration

Day	Highlights / Main Activity	Activity Distance	Activity Duration
Day 1	<i>Itoigawa area sightseeing & dinner at a local sake brewery</i>	n/a	4 Hours
Day 2 Hiking	Hiking from the Nechi Valley to the Oami Settlement	Approx. 10km	6 - 7 Hours (with breaks)
Day 3 Hiking	Hiking from Nakatsuchi Station to Tsugaike Kogen	Approx. 15km	7 - 8 Hours (with breaks)
Day 4 e-Biking	E-Biking from Tsugaike Kogen to Azumi Kutsukake Station & Matsumoto Castle sightseeing	Approx. 50km	7 Hours (with breaks)

3-Night/ 4-Day Tour Overview:

Day 1:

- Meet at JR Itoigawa Station
- Explore the Fossa Magna & Jade's Japanese Garden, Jade Ancient Beach
- Enjoy a private welcome dinner at Watanabe Brewery's Hōjōgura, a local sake brewery
- Overnight stay at Hotel White Cliff

Day 2:

- Start the day with a visit to the Salt Trail Museum
- Hike up and over a mountain pass on a scenic, forested section of the old Salt Road, finishing at the secluded countryside settlement of Oami
- Spend time with a local family at Tsuchi-no-ie, a small community-run guesthouse

Day 3:

- Walk to JR Hiraiwa Station & take a single-car local train to Nakatsuchi Station
- Trek along the Salt Road on a combination of dirt and paved trails to the small ski village of Tsugaike Kogen, stopping at several historical sites related to the trail along the way
- Overnight stay at a lovely family-run hotel (Resort Inn Yamaichi)

Day 4:

- Cruise the Salt Road on e-Bikes at the base of the Northern Alps from Tsugaike to Azumino, stopping for photos at scenic spots along the way
- Walk the grounds of the incredible Nishina Shinmei Shrine, a local power spot
- Transfer by train to Matsumoto and tour the majestic castle that marks the end of the Salt Road and our journey along it.



Day 1:

1:45 p.m. Meet your guide upon arrival at Itoigawa Station.

Step outside the station and take a quick 10-minute shuttle bus ride to the beautiful hillside complex housing the Fossa Magna and Chojagahara Archaeological museums. Enjoy a 2-hour tour guided by curators who will fill us in on the area's unique history and geology. This fascinating information will provide invaluable context for our journey on the Shionomichi over the next three days.



5:00 p.m. Check into Hotel White Cliff. This quaint hotel, located directly on the Salt Road, is surrounded by rice fields and features a relaxing natural *onsen* bath.

6:00 p.m. Sit down for a private, full-course French-fusion dinner featuring locally-grown and foraged seasonal ingredients at a small, award-winning sake brewery. Each individual course is paired with a sake chosen by the brew master to compliment that particular flavor palette.

Activity – Museum visits with all transportation by reserved jumbo taxi

Accommodation – Hotel | Private room | Futon | Shared bathroom

Included Meals – Dinner | Sea Food Dinner | Sake Tasting

Day 2:

Eat breakfast and check out. Luggage not required for the walk will be transported by support vehicles.

9:00 a.m. Assemble in the hotel lobby packed and ready to go, and begin the day with an easy, short walk to the Salt Trail Museum. Here we can see and feel the original handwoven straw boots, clothing, wooden-framed packs, and other implements used by the human porters and pack animals on the trail.

9:50 a.m. Slowly ascend on roads with excellent views of the surrounding countryside and eventually merge onto a forested path. This is the best-preserved section of the Shionomichi, and takes us past beautiful ponds, through stunning beech forest, over a mountain pass, and down along several waterfalls. Sit down for a bento (boxed lunch) at a quiet spot before crossing a suspension bridge and hiking up to the traditional rural settlement of Oami and our accommodation for the night – Tsuchi-no-ie.



3:30 p.m. Settle into your room, enjoy conversation with our hosts, explore the local shrine, relax, or help out in the kitchen with dinner, which starts at 6:00 p.m.

This is the shorter, yet tougher of our two walks, so we will keep the pace slow and even, stopping for breaks and a picnic lunch along the way. A side trip to a nearby summit with 360-degree panoramas is an option if time and weather allow.

Activity – Hiking | 10km (6.2 miles) | 6 – 7 hours

Accommodation – Community-run guesthouse | Shared room | Futon | Shared bathroom

Included Meals – Breakfast | Lunch (bento box) | Dinner

Day 3:

After breakfast try your hand at making a regional specialty food called *sasazushi*. Our hosts will prepare the necessary variety of colorful seasonal ingredients and show us what to do, and we can each make our own to enjoy as a traditional trail snack.

8:30 a.m. Kick off the day with a downhill walk to JR Hiraiwa Station, followed by a 20-minute train ride on the rugged Oito Line. This local train line travels through a series of tunnels cutting through the mountainous landscape, with dramatic views between.

10:00 a.m. Start walking from JR Nakatsuchi train station with a switch backing climb up to a sprawling agricultural community Re-join the Shionomichi and follow it all the way to Tsugaike, passing through numerous other traditional settlements that give a real sense of life in the Japanese countryside. Stop for lunch at a local eatery, and later check out a restored guard station and a 200-year-old accommodation that were in use during the Salt Road's heyday.



4:30 p.m. Arrive at Resort Inn Yamaichi and enjoy some well-earned downtime. This is another perfect chance to relax your tired body in the mineral-rich onsen bath before the fabulous homemade dinner made with rice and vegetables farmed by the owners.

Activity – Hiking | 15km (9.3 miles) | 6 – 7 hours

Accommodation – Family-run hotel | Private room | Bed | Ensuite bathroom & shower

Included Meals – Breakfast | Dinner

Day 4:

Today we leave the mountains for the valley and the countryside for the city as we make our way to Matsumoto and conclude our tour at the stunning centuries-old castle. We’ve done most of the hard work to get to from the ocean to Tsugaike, so today is our view-filled victory lap. Just as porters on the Shionomichi would have swapped their hard-working oxen for fast-moving horses here, we’ll be trading our boots for bikes.

7:30 a.m. Gather after checkout, and participate in a brief orientation on safety and the operation of your e-bike. Depart from the hotel, and pedal to neighboring Hakuba village, famous as an alpine sports paradise and host of the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics.

Now we’re in the heart of the HAKUBA VALLEY, sandwiched between the Japanese Alps to the west and lower-elevation *satoyama* to the east. Stunning views abound and will remain with us for the rest of the day, and our job is just to enjoy them. Stay low and cruise past a series of three quiet lakes, then traverse the mountainside through residential areas with beautifully manicured gardens and lofty views of the valley below.



Enjoy the impressive landscapes, quiet communities, ancient stone monuments, and local shrines as you go, before making a longer stop at the outstanding Nishina Shinmei Shrine. This quiet, local power spot is full of scenery and surprises. Stop for lunch, conclude the ride, and transfer by train to Matsumoto.

3:30 p.m. Tour the castle, reflect on your accomplishment, and head to Matsumoto Station for final goodbyes around 5:00 p.m.

Activity – e-Biking | 51km (32 miles) | 7 hours

Accommodation – NA

Included Meals – Breakfast

Accommodations:

Day	Location	Type	Room Type
1	Itoigawa, Niigata	Hotel	Private, Japanese style room and futon, Shared bathroom
2	Otari Village, Nagano (Oami Settlement)	Guesthouse	Shared, Japanese style room and futon, Shared bathroom
3	Otari Village, Nagano (Tsugaike Ski Resort)	Hotel	Private, Western style room and bed, Ensuite bathroom & shower

*Please note that you may be asked to show your passport when checking into accommodation in Japan, as it is a requirement for accommodation providers to take a photocopy of the passport of overseas guests. Please carry your passport with you.

The listed accommodations are examples, and other lodging options are available.

Tour Inclusions:

- 3 nights accommodation
- 3 breakfasts, 1 (packed) lunch, 3 dinners + basic trail snacks
- Drinking water (many access points to refill your own bottle)
- E-bikes, helmets & support car
- Entrance fees for all museums and historical sites visited during the tour
- Qualified and experienced English speaking guides throughout the tour
- Guest to guide ratio 5:1. We have a documented Emergency Response Plan (ERP) and all guides carry first aid kits.
- All transportation from the starting point at Itoigawa Station to the finishing point at Matsumoto Castle.

Exclusions:

- Travel to the starting point / travel from the finishing point of the tour
- Alcoholic beverages (with the exception of sake tasting on Day 1)
- Lunches (with the exception of a packed lunch on Day 2)
- Additional room charges such as minibar, extra cleaning, etc.
- Personal expenses
- Rental clothing and gear for trekking
- Luggage forwarding

Meals:

- Breakfast and dinner are generally provided by the accommodation, as is the custom in Japan, unless otherwise stated.
- Lunch will be either a bento (boxed lunch) on the trail, or at a restaurant along the way. (See the day-by-day itinerary for more details.)

Packing List:

Below is a list of essential and optional items for hiking and biking on the Shionomichi. Appropriate clothing will vary according to the season, but mornings and evenings can be quite cold in spring and fall. We can provide you with more information on the expected temperatures and weather conditions when you apply.

Essential Items (Year-Round)

- Comfortable footwear – light trekking shoes, trail runners, or hiking boots
- Rainwear – fully waterproof jacket and pants preferred to ponchos
- Hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses
- Water bottle / hydration system – at least 1.5L capacity
- Toiletries / personal medications
- Daypack (Approx. 15 to 30L capacity)
- Travel insurance
- Passport
- Cash (Small shops and restaurants often only accept cash)

Essential Items (Spring & Fall)

- Warm mid layer – Sweater, fleece, down, etc...
- Thermal top and bottoms
- Gloves
- Beanie

Optional Items

- Trekking poles
- Long pants – To protect against sunburn, ticks, etc...
- Bug spray
- Personal trail snacks
- Rain cover or waterproof liner (plastic bag) for backpack
- Hand sanitizer / wet wipes
- USB battery and charging cables for keeping your devices charged on the trail
- Swimwear (just in case!)

Important Information

Fitness Level / Suitability

This tour is considered a soft (non-technical) adventure that requires no special skills and is suitable for active individuals who have some hiking experience on varied terrain, are comfortable on a bike, and are physically able to be on their feet for up to 7 hours a day for consecutive days.

Food / Dietary Restrictions

Japan is a culinary wonderland abounding with diverse regional cuisine, and, as a general rule, we seek out traditional, local foods on our tours. We are aware, however, that guests may have allergies or other dietary restrictions (separate from personal preference), and we ask that you inform us of any such needs in as much detail as possible when applying to this tour. We will do our utmost to communicate your needs in advance to hotels, restaurants, etc., and arrange suitable alternatives whenever possible.

A note to vegetarians/vegans: Outside of the big cities, it can be very hard to arrange 100% plant-based food in Japan. Many standard offerings, such as miso soup, are likely to contain dashi or fish broth. Some degree of flexibility will go a long way when dining in rural areas.

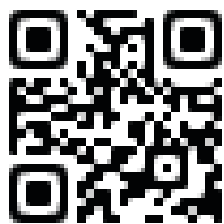
Safety

Safety is paramount and you can be assured all our guides are experienced and certified Wilderness First Aid practitioners. Our guides carry a First Aid Kit and prepare response plans to communicate with authorities in case of a medical or other emergencies. Risk assessments of the weather and potential hazards will be undertaken before and throughout the trip, with alternative plans ready to be put in place where required.



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Nagano Tourism Organization

Tel: +81 26-219-5274

Email: naganotoc@nagano-tabi.net

(Contact: Nagano Travel Operation Center)