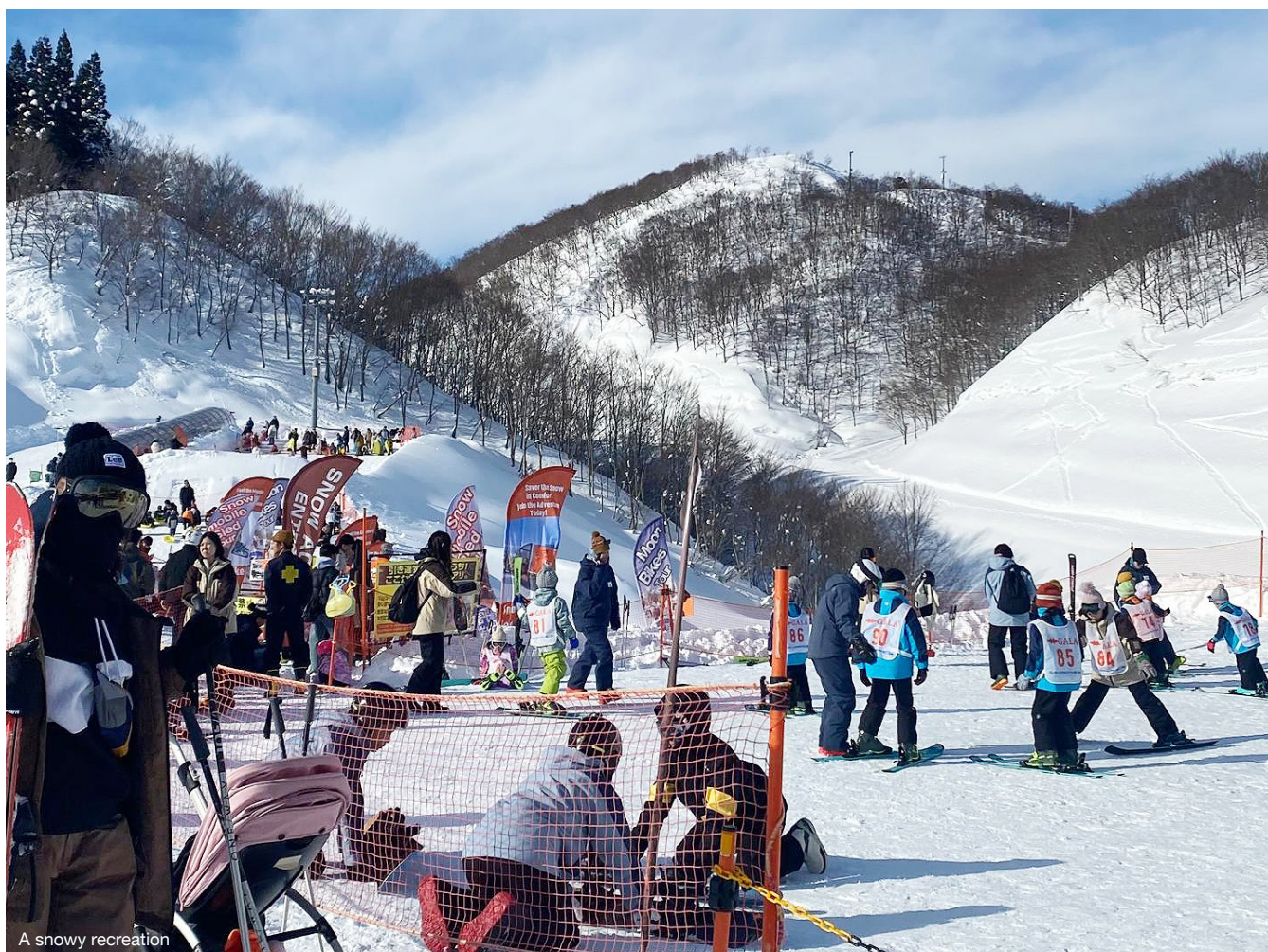




Giala Yuzawa



A snowy recreation



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Deep within the Japanese Alps, Gala Yuzawa is an enviable location that has earned the title of Snow Country, thanks to its abundant snowfall. Cold Siberian winds sweep across the Sea of Japan, gathering moisture before releasing it as snowfall over Niigata's rugged terrain. The result? Powdery snow of the highest quality, nicknamed Japow blanketed the region and transformed it into a playground for skiers, snowboarders and those seeking the magic of a winter wonderland. Part of the Niigata Prefecture, this enchanting destination with towering peaks and dramatic landscapes are a feast for the eyes.

What sets Gala Yuzawa apart is not just its natural beauty, but its accessibility. In just over an hour, the Joetsu Shinkansen whisks travellers from the heart of Tokyo to this alpine retreat. The train station connects directly to the ski resort's gondola, a rare convenience in Japan. Step off the train, hop into the gondola, and in minutes, visitors will be gliding up to the snow-covered slopes, ready to dive into the magic of Snow Country.

Travel Tip

If you are not rushed for time, consider the old Joetsu Mainline as an alternative to the bullet train. This scenic route treats travellers to breathtaking views of snowcapped valleys and the mountains in Niigata to tranquil bamboo-lined rivers as the train crosses the neighbouring Gunma Prefecture. The leisurely pace is ideal for those who wish to soak in the serene beauty of the landscapes, providing a peaceful alternative to the speed of the bullet train while travelling to or from Gala Yuzawa.

A journey through time and tradition

Gala Yuzawa, also known as just Gala, is a modern resort town, but its roots run deep in history. The broader Echigo Yuzawa region, of which Gala Yuzawa is a part, is famously brought to life in Yasunari Kawabata's Nobel Prize-winning novel, *Snow Country* (Yukiguni). This literary masterpiece puts the town of Yuzawa on the map, inspiring

travellers to visit and experience Kawabata's poetic picture of life, from its harsh winters to the warmth of its people.

Walking through the town, you can almost imagine the quiet melancholy and fleeting romances Kawabata described. For those curious, the Snow Country Museum offers a deeper dive into Kawabata's world and the inspirations behind his work.

Winter sports at their finest

Gala Yuzawa caters to skiers and snowboarders of all skill levels. The resort boasts a variety of trails, ranging from gentle beginner slopes to thrilling black diamond runs. Whether you are carving your first turns or tackling advanced terrains, the Gala's groomed sections, forest courses, and deep fluffy powder trails are a dream for those shredding their way down the slopes.

Adding to this allure, Gala Yuzawa provides ski and snowboard schools with lessons available in English and Mandarin. This thoughtful approach elevates its charm as a go-to destination.

Fun on the slopes



Fun beyond the slopes

Gala Yuzawa is not just for skiers and snowboarders. It is also a destination for anyone eager to immerse themselves in the magic of snowy wonderland. The gondola ride itself is a treat, offering spectacular views of the snow-blanketed peaks.

Families and those seeking carefree snow-filled fun will find Gala Yuzawa the ideal escape. The sledding area, with gentle slopes, is suitable for both children and adults. With sleds, snow boots, and all the essentials available for rent right at the station, even those unprepared can dive straight into the adventure and make the most of the winter wonderland.

For a more adventurous experience, the Snowmobile Sleigh Tours, Moonbike, or Snowkart Tours are a must try. These guided excursions take you along the pristine trails, offering the thrill of zipping through alpine landscapes. It is a chance to break away from the crowds and experience the serenity of Snow Country.

Unique winter experiences

One of the most enchanting experiences in Gala Yuzawa is the Kamakura Igloo Festival, where traditional snow igloos are built and illuminated at night, creating a magical winter wonderland. Visitors can step inside these igloos, enjoy warm treats or simply marvel at the artistry of these ephemeral structures.

The nearby Yuzawa Onsen Town adds another layer to the region's winter charm. Every year, typically in early March, the

Yuzawa Onsen Snow Festival brings time-honoured traditions to life. Held on the lower Nunoba slopes of the Yuzawa Kogen Ski Resort, the festival features breathtaking snow sculptures, stunning fireworks display, and the unique Torch Descent, where skiers glide down the slopes carrying torches, creating a mesmerising spectacle. It is a wonderful complement to your winter adventures in Gala Yuzawa, a chance to experience local culture in a picturesque setting.

Onsen bliss

A day on the slopes is incomplete without a visit to an onsen. These traditional hot springs are a cornerstone of Japanese culture. The mineral-rich waters are said to have healing properties, soothes tired muscles and promotes overall well-being. Gala Yuzawa and its surrounding area are dotted with these steaming sanctuaries.

From bustling indoor baths to tranquil open-air pools framed by snow-draped mountains, every onsen experience around Gala Yuzawa is unique. Picture yourself soaking in a natural hot spring under the falling snow, while gazing at winter's beauty that unfolds in every direction. It is a moment of pure bliss and an unforgettable way to end your day in Snow Country.

From Sake to local flavours

No journey to Gala Yuzawa is complete without indulging in its culinary delights. The region is renowned for its rice, grown in fields nourished by the pure mountain water. This

Mineral rich Onsen spa



Gala Yuzawa station



rice serves as the base for some of Japan's finest sake.

The Ponshukan Sake Museum at Echigo-Yuzawa Station is a must-visit for sake lovers. Here, you can explore an impressive selection of sake from Niigata Prefecture using a fun token system, allowing you to sample different flavours at your own pace. The one-of-a-kind experience combines Japan's love for sake with its innovative vending machine culture.

Upon entering the Sake Tasting Corner, you will be greeted by a quirky statue of a passed-out businessman, setting the tone for a playful experience inside. The process is simple. Choose your sake from one of the over a hundred sake vending machines, place your *choko* (sake cup) underneath, insert the required number of tokens, and press the button. As you listen to the rumble of the passing trains overhead, your mechanical bartender effortlessly dispenses your drink.





For a truly unique experience, indulge in the sake-infused hot spring, where you can unwind and enjoy the delicate aromas of sake while soaking in the soothing waters.

The local cuisine is just as inviting as the sake, hearty and comforting, perfect for the cold winter months. For noodles, try the region's speciality, *hegi soba* made with buckwheat and red *funori* seaweed and served on a traditional wooden tray. Warm up with *noppe*, a flavourful vegetable stew. Fresh river fish dishes are a regional highlight and another must-try. For a Niigata's staple sweet treat, enjoy *sasa dango*, mugwort dumplings with sweet red bean filling wrapped in bamboo leaves. Many local restaurants proudly use ingredients sourced from the region, letting the natural flavours speak for themselves.



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Seasonal surprises

While winter may steal the spotlight, Gala Yuzawa transforms with the seasons. In spring, the melting snow reveals lush greenery and blooming cherry blossoms. Hiking trails weave through forests and mountains, with breathtaking vistas and opportunities to encounter local wildlife.

Summer brings cool breezes, providing a refreshing escape from the city heat. One standout feature is the 350 metres summer slope which takes full advantage of the natural terrain. Japan's advanced artificial snow mat, crafted from plastic brush material, provides excellent grip for snowboards and skis, making it a thrilling experience even in warmer months.



Hegi soba



Mugwort Dumplings



Sasa dango



Homestay

The ultimate winter escape

Every element of Gala Yuzawa and its surrounding areas, from snowy peaks to warm onsen and vibrant traditions, invites visitors to experience the harmonious blend of nature and culture. Whether you seek adrenaline on the slopes or quiet moments to enjoy the sweeping views, Gala Yuzawa offers a winter escape that lingers in your heart long after the snow melts.

So, pack your winter gear, bring your sense of wonder, and let Gala Yuzawa welcome you to its snowy embrace. Here, in the heart of Snow Country, adventure and tranquillity coexist, where the mountains call and the hot springs soothe. Every moment is a thrilling chapter, promising an unforgettable experience.



Sake Barrels



Sake vending machine



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