Introduction to Tateyama

Tateyama Mountain, along with Mt. Fuji and Mt. Hakusan, is one of the three sacred mountains of Japan. The Tateyama area has long attracted religious ascetics and explorers, painters and poets. The home of Tateyama Mountain Worship since the 8th century, it is also the modern birthplace of Japanese alpine climbing.

In the words of the famous poet and regional governor Otomo Yakamochi (8th century):

*The enduring snows of Mount Tachi (Tateyama)*
*Refresh me even during the summer*
*They are the creation of the gods (kami)*

This uniquely Japanese integration of culture and nature is embodied in the TATEYAMA MUSEUM of TOYAMA. Opened in 1991 as the first Toyama Prefectural Museum, the museum can only be understood in the context of nature. One has to imagine a time when travel to Tateyama was an arduous ordeal of weeks. It was even said that one time climbing Tateyama was equal to ten times climbing Mount Fuji.

Religious pilgrims arrived here only to encounter deep river gorges, Japan's highest waterfall ("Shomyo" or "Buddhist Chanting Falls") and a 3,015 meter (9,892 feet) climb to a world above timberline with steaming vents and windsewn crags with names like "Hell Valley" the "Rice Fields of the Starving Ghosts", and then peaks of the Northern Japan Alps: Oyama or "Great Mountain", "Sword Mountain", "Paradise Mountain".

Three parts of the Museum

The theme of the Museum is the relationship between humans and nature in Tateyama, particularly as it is found in Tateyama Worship.

1 Tenji-Kan (view time: 40 min.)

The main buildings include the Exhibition Hall, designed by world renowned architect Arata Isozaki, an auxiliary hall displaying *Mikoshi* (festival carts for kami) and alpine climbing gear, and the Kyoim-bo, a beautifully preserved 19th century religious pilgrim's lodge.

2 Yobo-Kan (view time: 50 min.)

The Yobokan or "Farseeing Theater" has daily presentations of a

Main Exhibition Hall

As you climb the circular stairs to the third floor's geology and ecology exhibits, you are symbolically ascending into the mountains and the beech forest. When you descend to the second floor exhibits on Tateyama Worship, you will have a grand view out the windows toward Mount Tateyama, just as religious pilgrims in earlier centuries might have seen the mountains. On the first floor you will find areas for special exhibitions and the information desks.

Third Floor: Geology and Ecology of Tateyama

This floor explores the dramatic landscape and ecology of Mount Tateyama, among the tallest of the Northern Japan Alps which lie at the boundary between the colliding Eurasian and the North American tectonic plates. Tateyama is a mountain of superlatives. The lower slopes of the Mountain are covered with a lush 10,000 year old beech forest while the upper slopes have recorded some of the world’s heaviest snow falls and Tateyama and its neighbor Mt. Tsaruwagi contain Japan’s only three glaciers. The cold waters of the Joganji River cascade precipitously from the top of Tateyama at 3,015m (9,892 ft) to the sea in a mere 50 km (31 miles), while the 6.5 km x 4.5 km (4 mi x 2 mi) Tateyama Caldera contains active volcanic vents.

Here you will learn about "Hell Valley" and "The Rice Fields of the Hungry Ghosts" as well as specialized agricultural dykes developed to irrigate rice fields and modern sado dauns constructed to tame destructive floods.
The Museum’s modern art Mandala Park, designed for a sensory understanding of Tateyama Worship, is by famed architect Kijo Rokkaku who draws inspiration from pre-modern rituals and playfulness.

**Second Floor: Tateyama Religion**

Japanese mountain religion began in the 8th century. Tateyama was one of the centers of this movement. We have evidence that Tateyama was first opened as a mountain for Buddhism as early as 701. Shugendo - a syncretic Japanese tradition combining elements of Shinto, animism, Taoism and esoteric Buddhism - became established here by the middle of the Heian Period (794-1185), and by the end of this period Tateyama had become one of Japan’s leading sacred mountains.

Tateyama Worship was mainstream, widely influential and officially sanctioned, and yet unique because of its extraordinary natural setting at Mount Tateyama. It was widely believed that both Hell and the Pure Land of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism were in Tateyama, and that one could meet dead ancestors here.

Some of the most striking features of Tateyama Worship center on the Buddhist concept of Hell, or Naraka, which evolved from the Sanskrit concept of Hell in Hinduism, a place where reincarnated people with bad moral character (bad karma) remain until this negative karma is exhausted. And like the Hinduism from which it evolved, Buddhism has the concept of a judge of the dead, called “Yama” in Hinduism and “Emma” in Japanese Buddhism. In Japanese Buddhism, Enma sits in judgment at a bridge separating this life from the next, which is vividly illustrated in the Tateyama Mandala.

**Tateyama Mandala**

These dramatic teaching scrolls include the founding story of the hunter Saezi Ariyori who tracks a bear he has wounded to the Tamadate cave on Tateyama’s slopes, where he has a vision that it has become a golden Amida Buddha. In the Tateyama narrative one could either climb Tateyama to symbolically achieve “Jodo” (Paradise), or one could participate in the Cloth Bridge Sacrament to avoid the hells represented by the eerie volcanic activity and other worldly terrain on the slopes of Tateyama.

By crossing the Cloth Bridge between Emma (Lord of Hell) Hall and Uba Hall (Old Hag), religious pilgrims, especially women, could be absolved from Hell in the afterlife.

**Invitation to the Extended Museum**

When you leave the Exhibition Hall we invite you to cross the Cloth Bridge on the way to the Yobokan Theater, enjoy the films and interact with the Mandala Park, and experience the natural beauty of Tateyama’s spiritually rich world.

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