

Riverside for Kids

This is a compilation of places and activities for those with children – when you find other good activities, please let us know and we will add them to the list.

Riverside Park

Riverside park (Tsukiyono Yaze Shinsui Koen) near Jomo Kogen station - great whirly slide, and lots of space to run around. Slide is better with a piece of cardboard to sit upon – you can get cardboard boxes from Beisia supermarket just down the road. Also it is a good for picnics and has a local farmers' market on weekends

Gunma Cycle Sports Centre

Up behind Jomo Kogen station. If you are at the traffic lights looking at the station (there will be a police box on your right) turn right and follow the road for 800m or so then take the left sign post to Sarugakyo. The Cycle Centre is about 15 minutes up this road and is well sign posted. This place has a big cycle track for adults but of more interest to kids is an area with lots of wacky 2-person bicycle contraptions and weird car like things that are great for one adult and one child. There are also a couple of areas with tricycles plus a bicycle monorail, mini train, mini golf etc. It has a cafe, but there are also lots of tables for picnics.

Takumi no Sato farming village

A lot of the houses have been turned into art and craft workshops or restaurants. You can have a go at everything from making soba noodles to woodwork, dried flowers, ceramic painting to papermaking. Many children particularly like the woodwork studio (make a stool or a mini bookshelf) and the mask-making place (lots of traditional Japanese and cartoon character masks ready for painting). These two locations are close together a little way outside the main village – it is about a 20 minute walk from the main Takumi no Sato carpark, past rice paddies and fruit fields or you can drive and park outside. There are a lot of restaurants, mainly doing home-made soba and tempura, but a few others offer crepe, cakes and ice cream. Follow route 17 north (towards Sarugakyo), and it's signposted off to the left (in Japanese).

Water Museum

Mizu no Kikokan (Water Museum) in Minakami. This has tanks of fish and displays of how the rivers work. There is also a good riverside park adjacent to the museum. It's on the main road (right hand side as you face upstream) as you drive to Minakami

Lockheart Castle

This is a fake "Scottish" castle with an eccentric mixture of displays inside and out (Princess Diana's Rolls Royce, two rooms of model Santas etc). The complex also has quite a good children's play area (across the wooden bridge) and indoor play room, toy exhibition, stone exhibition, couple of cafes, shops and ice cream stand. On weekends they also have live entertainment - most often one Canadian guy singing and playing the guitar (Kelly), and another Canadian (Willy) juggling and fooling

around. Take Route 17 towards Numata, turn right on to route 145: Lockheart Castle is a little further along on your left.

Abandoned Gold Mine

This is for kids who can walk for an hour or so. Head up stream from Riverside and you will pass through a dark, concrete-on-both-sides section of road just before the Vespa Pachinko place. There is a small dirt road on the right; pull in there and park the car. There are days worth of walking to be done on these forest trails. The Gold Mine and crushing press are on the hill side on the left.

Farm Park

Ikaho Green Bokujo (farm park) is a big green space with lots of animals (pony rides, cows with milking demonstrations/chance to have a go, sheep, rabbits et al) plus various play areas, ceramic workshop where you can do things such as paint your own plate, mini "Western Town" and so on. They make their own ice cream on the premises. Take the expressway to Shibukawa Ikaho – the Farm Park is on the main road heading west out of town (the big green signs with cows on are unmissable).

Japan Snake Centre

A zoo dedicated to snakes with the chance to handle the snakes and watch them being milked for venom. About an hour's drive away, near Takasaki. There's a map at <http://snake-center.com/access/>

Exploring

What the children often enjoy most is just little walks near the house or along any of the roads leading up into the forests. They can find lizards, frogs, grasshoppers etc everywhere, and the stream has mini crabs and other interesting beasts (Beisia supermarket sells cheap plastic nets and cages if you want to catch anything for closer inspection). A troupe of monkeys occasionally passes through the valley, which can be very exciting. Also watch out for snakes - there are a few around, most harmless (main one to watch out for is the small, dark mamushi) but they are generally unlikely to bite unless you tread on them, so watch where you are going.

If you head up to Gaijin Mura in Kamimoku, you can follow the trail up past the all the houses to where a little bridge across the river. Upstream from there is a good place for children to poke around under rocks in the water to see what they can find.

If it rains

Beisia supermarket or the Y100 shop in Numata (in the old department store in the centre of town) have plenty of drawing and craft materials, cheap toys and so on to keep them busy. Also, a little trip up or down the line on the local train from Kamimoku can be fun, but check the timetable before you head out as the trains are not so frequent. A steam train sometimes runs along that track, most often at around midday, but you could ask at the station “Kyo wa kikansha ga toorimasu ka? Nanji desu ka? = Does a steam train come through today? What time?”

Places to eat with children

Phil's pizza place called "Mana Café". It is at the bottom of the hill below Gaijin Mura on the main road and next door to the Seven11. This has pizza, pasta and waffles and the dog "Alice" is great with kids.

Kitchen Cafe Tokura, next to Beisia supermarket on the upstream side, does more exciting varieties of pizza and pasta and also some fusion-style dishes, good salads etc for adults.

Apple products café. Across the road from the Culture Centre (which is just slightly upstream from Seven11 and Mana Café is a café specializing in apple products. This includes "Apple Curry Rice" as well as a good, homemade apple pie with ice cream.