

Sharing the Charms of the Hakuba Valley



David Enright snowboarding in Hakuba

David Enright from Canada is sharing the charms of Nagano Prefecture's Hakuba Valley, a ski resort known for its stunning mountain scenery and abundant high-quality snow, with visitors from around the world.

SATO KUMIKO

HAKUBA Valley stretches along the foothills of Japan's Northern Alps in northern Nagano Prefecture. A popular ski resort with a towering mountain backdrop and high-quality powder snow, Hakuba hosted some of the events at the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics. Over the last ten years or so, the area has become increasingly well-known among skiers outside Japan, and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 200,000 overseas skiers visited the valley in the winter.

David Enright from Canada has been introducing the splendor of Hakuba Valley to such foreign visitors for some twenty years. David first came to Japan for a month as a high school exchange stu-

dent in Chiba Prefecture and later had the opportunity to study in Japan for a year. He moved to Hakuba Village in the center of the Hakuba Valley in 1994. The Japanese woman he would later marry introduced David to Hakuba, thinking it might be a good place for him to live given his familiarity with the great outdoors in Canada where he grew up.

"Hakuba Village is surrounded by the majestic Northern Alps. I was impressed that Japan had such amazing mountain scenery when I first visited. More than anything, there were perfect mountains for skiing, which I love, with plenty of quality snow," says David.



David Enright



A back-country skier in the Hakuba Valley



David (left) provides training in avalanche safety

According to David, until about 20 years ago the accepted wisdom was that the mountains of North America and Europe were the best places to go to ski. But now, especially for people from Australia and countries in Asia, Japan is considered a great destination for skiing, as it is closer than North America and Europe and jet lag is not an issue. Moreover, ski resorts such as those in Hakuba Valley have acquired a great reputation for the quality of the skiing. At Hakuba, in addition to ski slopes that can be enjoyed by beginners, there is a long course measuring some 8,000 meters for advanced skiers to enjoy.

David started a private company in 2000, the predecessor of the Evergreen

Outdoor Center, offering avalanche safety training sessions. Simultaneously, he also started a guide business offering outdoor tours and an English-language ski school. The Evergreen Outdoor Center organizes activities such as back-country skiingⁱ and snowshoeⁱⁱ trekking so that visitors can experience something different from skiing on the slopes. Back-country skiing is particularly popular.

“The Hakuba mountains are a place for experienced skiers to do back-country skiing. These mountains are rewarding, as back-country skiing requires one to think about the topography, weather conditions, snow quality, and various other conditions,” says David. “There is also the risk of avalanches, so it is essential to take on this challenge while also ensuring your own safety.”

David holds English-language skiing lessons and instructor courses, as well as avalanche safety training sessions, making use of his Canadian qualifications in avalanche countermeasures. Having encountered an avalanche when he was a child, he understands how frightening they are, and during the ski season, he goes around the field to ensure everyone’s safety, taking precautionary measures if there is any risk of an avalanche.

“Getting out and enjoying nature is

the best way to learn about how great it is,” says David. “In Hakuba, there are high mountains, lots of snow, beautiful marshes and lakes, deep forests, and clean air and water. It is a place to heal your body and mind.”

When the snow has melted after winter, the Evergreen Outdoor Center offers canyoningⁱⁱⁱ, kayaking, and other adventure sports programs for visitors in the green season. David says he hopes to add various programs in the future, like those for children in which they can learn about nature through play. [7](#)



Summer canyoning in the Hakuba Valley

- i When back-country skiing, you ski using your own strength in places other than those prepared as ski slopes and without using a ski lift. You traverse the natural snowy mountain with skis or a snowboard.
- ii A walking aid to allow you to walk on top of snow
- iii Canyoning is a type of mountaineering that involves traveling in canyons by walking, climbing, abseiling and swimming, etc.