

# A Masterpiece of Photography: The Tadami Line in Winter that Captivated the World

Photographer Kameyama Takeshi has a strong international reputation for his photos capturing winter snowscapes. We spoke with him about the enchanting beauty of Japan's stunning snowy scenery even in the bitter cold. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



**K**ameyama Takeshi is a non-professional photographer based in Niigata City, just around two hours north of Tokyo by Shinkansen. In 2022, his photo “Tadami Line in Winter<sup>1</sup>” featuring the snowy landscape of Fukushima Prefecture earned him the prestigious title of Nature Photographer of the Year at the world’s largest international photography competition, the International Photography Awards. This marked the first time a Japanese photographer received this honor, leading to increased international attention.

Kameyama states, “Having been born and raised in snowy Niigata, snowfall has been a natural part of my life since childhood. However, in recent years, with the increase in snowless days, I have started to worry that we may lose the opportunity to witness these magnificent landscapes. Capturing these moments in photographs serves as a record. Moreover, I hope that those who view the photos will be impressed with the scenes and feel compelled to protect them. I photograph snowscapes to foster awareness and inspire action towards environ-



Kameyama Takeshi

The photo “Tadami Line in Winter” won a top prize in the International Photography Awards  
Photo: Kameyama Takeshi



A fantastical snowy landscape in Ouchijuku<sup>2</sup>, Fukushima Prefecture, where thatched-roof traditional houses line the roadside  
Photo: Kameyama Takeshi

mental conservation.”

Motivated by these feelings, Kameyama says that he continues to capture photographs of particularly enchanting snowscapes in his local areas of Niigata and Fukushima Prefectures. “I revisit the same locations numerous times until I capture a shot I am satisfied with. Ideally, I aim for pure clean white snow as the first condition, accompanied by sunlight as the second. The third condition involves a light snowfall, and the fourth is calmness, creating a mirror-like reflection on water,” he explains. “However, it’s rare for all these conditions to align more than a few times a year. Therefore, when I decided to focus on capturing the snowy landscape with the Tadami Line train in Fukushima Prefecture, I would wake up at 2 a.m., drive for three hours on snowy roads, climb a pitch-black mountain path, and wait in sub-zero temperatures for about an hour until the train arrived. This process was repeated time and again.” This dedication resulted in the globally renowned award for “Tadami Line in Winter” at the international photography competition.

He continues, “I have always been fond of the scenery along the Tadami Line and have visited many times in the past. However, along with its beauty, I also came to recognize the harshness and severity of nature. In winter, the deep snow requires constant removal, and there are times when trains experience delays or cancellations. In 2011, heavy rainfall caused severe damage, with the bridge being washed away. As a result, there was a section that remained impassable for 11 years. Amid a decline in the number of passengers and talk of discontinuation, local efforts made by the community led to the resumption of operations on the entire line in 2023. Moved by the resilience of people living closely with nature, I chose the Tadami Line as my subject to capture through photography the harmonious coexistence of nature and people along

its route.”

Recognized on the international stage with “Tadami Line in Winter,” Kameyama has been selected as a finalist for the Lucie Awards, often referred to as the Academy Awards of the photography world. In 2023, he continues to make a mark globally, including recognition in an international photography contest in Paris.

Taking photographs of snowy landscapes is a dangerous and demanding endeavor, involving the transport of equipment weighing over 30kg in the bitter cold, and patiently waiting for the perfect moment. However, the allure of Japanese snowy landscapes surpasses these challenges.


The most beautiful snowy landscapes, as perceived by Kameyama, extend across his local Niigata, as well as the northeastern regions of Fukushima and Yamagata, encompassing the Iide Mountain Range<sup>3</sup>.

“Having grown up with my father managing and engaging in conservation activities at a mountain hut



Mount Eburisashi in the Iide Mountain Range, considered one of the world’s top snowfall areas  
Photo: Kameyama Takeshi

in the area, I climbed the mountain numerous times from childhood. In winter, the deep snow renders it an inhospitable place, yet its magnificent, gleaming white appearance holds a sense of admiration and nostalgia. For me, it is the ultimate snowy landscape.”

Kameyama expresses his desire to continue capturing photographs of captivating yet lesser-known places in the future. Through his perspective, his works undoubtedly have the potential to rediscover the beauty of snowscapes that one might overlook even while living in Japan. 

1. A railway line operated by East Japan Railway Company (JR East) connecting Aizu-Wakamatsu Station in Aizuwakamatsu City, Fukushima Prefecture, to Koide Station in Uonuma City, Niigata Prefecture. It is a regional transportation line.
2. A town in southern Aizu, Fukushima Prefecture, that flourished as a post town in the Edo period (early 17th century to mid-late 19th century). Currently, it has become a tourist destination where traditional thatched-roof houses, preserving the atmosphere of that era, line the area. In 1981, it was designated as a nationally designated Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings.
3. The Iide Mountain Range belongs to the Bandai-Asahi National Park and spans the borders of Niigata, Fukushima, and Yamagata Prefectures. It stretches approximately 20 km from north to south and includes the major peaks of Mount Iide (2,105m) and Mount Eburisashi (1,636m).