

**K**amakura is a traditional event held at *ko-shogatsu* or Little New Year (around January 15) in Akita Prefecture and Niigata Prefecture. In “houses” made of snow, people worship the God of Water, and pray for domestic happiness, commercial success, and a good harvest. The houses themselves are also called “*kamakura*.”

The Kamakura in the city of Yokote in Akita Prefecture is especially famous, and is said to date back around 400 years. The current format, where children gather and play in the kamakura built to worship the God of Water, became the custom from the Meiji period (1868–1912). The children give out a sweet, warm drink made of rice known as *amazake* to people who come to pay a devotional visit to the God of Water in the kamakura. In February each year (this year, February 15 and 16), the Snow Festival is held, and more than 100 kamakura measuring around 3 m high are built all over town, and events to entertain the local people and tourists are staged. Small kamakura are also built around the town, and candles are lit inside them. In Yokote, there are places



The Kamakura in Yokote

# KAMAKURA

where people can see kamakura all year round, not just in winter. At the sightseeing attraction Kamakura Hall, life-size kamakura made from Yokote snow are preserved all year round in a room where the temperature is kept regulated at minus 10°C.

Thousands of little *kamakura* igloos make for a fantastic scene.



**1: At Kamakura events, a certain food that is eaten at New Year is grilled and given out along with the *amazake* drink (photo). What is it?**



- A:** Grilled beef
- B:** Grilled fish
- C:** Mochi rice cakes



**2: There are several theories about the origin of the word "*kamakura*." One theory is that the *kamakura* resembles the shape of something that used to be in the kitchen. What was it?**



- A:** Cooking pot
- B:** Cooking stove
- C:** Table

*See the back page for answers.*