

Washi Papermaking in Gokayama

Gokayama washi is a traditional handmade paper. It is a specific type of Etchu washi, a collective term that includes other paper materials made in Toyama Prefecture such as Yao washi and Birudan-*gami*. The paper is made of bast fibers from the paper mulberry tree, known as *kozo*. A thickening extract called *neri* made from *tororo-aoi*, a type of abelmoschus plant, is added to the bast fibers. This unique mixture gives Gokayama washi its beautiful appearance and supple texture. The entwined fibers from the *kozo* bast also result in a durable and long-lasting paper.

During the Edo period (1603–1868), Gokayama washi was developed under the protection of the ruling Kaga domain, for which it was exclusively produced and delivered. Indeed, it was often used for currency issued by the feudal clan. The paper trade was an important industry under Kaga rule. Washi was mainly produced during winter, while silk and saltpeter were produced during the warmer months in large *gassho-zukuri* houses. To this day, this type of washi is considered a high-quality material and is often used by artists, including woodblock printers and painters, as well as in the production of items such as lanterns and traditional umbrellas.

Today, visitors to Gokayama can stop by venues such as the Gokayama Washi no Sato (Gokayama Washi Village) to learn about this handmade paper as well as join papermaking workshops where you can make simple items in about 20 minutes.