

Toyooka Bag Industry

Toyooka has a history of bag-making that stretches back over a thousand years, and today is responsible for 80 percent of Japan's current bag production. When the industry first picked up in the area, Toyooka was focused on the creation of *kiryu zaiku*, or willow wickerwork craft that featured items used for storage and transportation. During the late 1800s when railways, bridges, and hotels were being built, these willow cases developed into travel bags with the addition of buckles and handles. The origin of Toyooka bags can be traced back to the *kiryu zaiku* woven cases, which featured three leather bands and were exhibited at the second National Industrial Exhibition in 1881. From there, Toyooka's first bags entered the retail market and were sold in 1917 offering *urushi*-lacquered *kiryu zaiku* basket cases with lock attachments.

During the Taisho (1912–1926) and Showa (1926–1945) eras, wickerwork production in Toyooka shifted from hand-crafted *kiryu zaiku* to more mass-production items to meet consumer demand. This is when Toyooka became home to the wicker container industry (*kiryu zaiku*) that is known today. Over time, bags were modernized to match consumer lifestyles, using new types of fabrics such as plastic fiber and PVC. Toyooka today continues to manufacture bags for domestic and international brands.

Visitors to Toyooka will find Caban Street ("Bag" Street), an area where a number of local bag companies retail stores are clustered. It's a great place to browse through the offerings of local bag businesses, which specialize in everything from custom bags to repairs. One regional brand worth noting is Toyooka Kaban, a registered trademark of the Hyogo Prefecture Bag Industry Association. Each company part of this association creates bags under their product line and can only be sold under the Toyooka Kaban label after clearing a strict examination to be certified as a quality product of the region. Prized for its exceptional quality and functional designs, Toyooka Kaban creates bags for multiple purposes using materials from leather to canvas. These bags are manufactured locally by craftsmen who have honed their skills in Toyooka. Thanks to their popularity and durability, Toyooka Kaban products can now be purchased at shops and department stores around Japan.