

Higashi-Chaya District

Higashi-Chaya is the largest of Kanazawa's three historic entertainment, or "teahouse," districts. It was established in 1820 as a place for *geiko* (the local name for geisha) to entertain wealthy merchants with music, dance, and games. The district's traditional wooden buildings and lattice-work windows retain the atmosphere of their 200-year history. Today, many of these buildings function as cafes, restaurants, sweet shops, and craft shops, but some are still *geiko* teahouses. Although the world of *geiko* entertainment is exclusive and access must be gained by referral, general visitors can tour some teahouses and see a *geiko* show.

Ochaya Shima is a former *geiko* teahouse that now functions as a museum dedicated to Higashi-Chaya's *geiko* culture. The building looks much as it has for 200 years, with a plain wood exterior and bright red walls, *tatami* mat flooring, and a small courtyard garden inside. The rooms where *geiko* entertained patrons now display *geiko* hair ornaments, musical instruments, and tableware.

Kaikaro is a working *geiko* teahouse in a 195-year-old building with a room featuring *tatami* mats woven with gold leaf. During the day, the building is open to the general public for a fee. On certain nights, Kaikaro hosts an interactive *geiko* performance in English called Geisha Evenings in Kanazawa. Some guests can join in traditional games with the *geiko*. Reservations can be made online.

Gold leaf production is a signature craft of Kanazawa, and Higashi-Chaya has many shops selling gold-leaf products. Visitors can try applying real gold leaf to accessories such as plates, chopsticks, and jewelry boxes at some stores.