

Aikawa

The town of Aikawa is located in the northwestern part of the island and was a bustling city at the height of Sado's "gold rush" in the early Edo period (1603–1868). A total of 78 tons of gold was produced throughout Sado's gold mining history, with Aikawa contributing the most out of all the island's districts.

The booming mining industry attracted great numbers of people in search of work to Sado. At its peak in the early 1600s, Aikawa had a population of 40,000 to 50,000. For comparison, the current population of Sado Island as a whole was around 56,000 as of March 2018. Aikawa's main mine for both gold and silver was Dohyu no Warito, a mountain excavated so heavily that it literally split in half. Silver was discovered on Sado at nearby Tsurushi, and the mine there was operational from 1542 to 1946.

Traditional mining techniques were used in the Aikawa mines until the end of the Edo period, when mining on Sado began to decline. From the beginning of the Meiji era (1868–1912), Japan rushed toward industrial modernization, including the introduction of new practices from outside Japan that let miners dig deeper and extract more groundwater. Many of the structures from this era, such as the Kitazawa Flotation Plant and the Takatou elevator shaft, have been preserved in Aikawa today.

Visitors can learn about the history of gold and silver mining at Kirarium Sado, an information center that explains the history and function of the gold and silver mines, and at the Sado Kinzan Gold Mine Historical Site, where tours of two tunnels show visitors the places where precious metals were mined. The narrower Sodayu Tunnel was used in the Edo period, while the Doyu Tunnel was dug in 1899 to accommodate new technology such as carts and a crushing plant for gold ore. The crushed ore was delivered to the nearby Kitazawa Flotation Plant, a facility that used cutting-edge technology to process gold ore.