

Kitayama River Rafting

The village of Kitayama was a logging center from the Edo period (1603–1868) through to the mid-twentieth century. Timber from the area was used in the construction of Shingu Castle (1619–1633), a coastal fort at the mouth of the Kumano River, and for other major defensive structures in Western Japan. Logs felled in Kitayama were sold in Shingu after being transported down the Kitayama and Kumano rivers. Villagers would fasten the logs together and create long rafts, which they would navigate downstream. This method was used until around 1965 when a dam made a section of the Kitayama River impassable.

Today, you can tour a section of the Kitayama River on log rafts similar to those previously constructed in the village. The rafts are steered along a relatively peaceful, scenic 5.5-kilometer stretch of the river. You have to stand up and hold handrails on choppy stretches but can sit down and relax on calmer stretches. The rafts measure 30 meters in length and are made up of several rafts tied together. They are far smaller than they would have been during the Edo period but still weigh several tons in total. Originally, the rafts were dismantled at Shingu and sold as timber. Nowadays, they are pulled out of the water using a crane and transferred by truck back upriver.