

Settaya Area

Nagaoka's Settaya area is one of the last remaining places where the atmosphere of the Edo period (1603–1867) has been preserved in Niigata Prefecture.

Around 80 percent of the buildings in central Nagaoka were destroyed during an air raid in 1945, but Settaya escaped major damage. The area was traditionally a center of food and drink production, and the manufacturing of soy sauce, miso, and high-quality Niigata sake continues today. The brand presence of the successful products originating here reaches across Japan, and in some cases, even to markets in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The Koshi No Murasaki Soy Sauce Brewery makes a range of well-known sauces and condiments. The building, which is noted for its brick chimney, was constructed in the Meiji era (1868–1912). Its appearance has changed very little in the past century.

Down the street, the Yoshinogawa Sake Brewery produces mainly alcoholic drinks, including sake using Niigata's famous high-quality rice and spring water. The brewery also has an on-site bar where visitors can sample the drinks produced there.

Saffron liqueur is a famous local product that was once popular across the country, but today is sold only in Nagaoka and the vicinity. The Saffron Liqueur Brewery, the drink's ancestral home, is now a museum showcasing the history of the drink and the family that created it.

The liqueur-making process uses strands of saffron and locally produced honey, which give the drink a distinctive flavor. Saffron liqueur is thick and syrupy in texture, and is occasionally used as a home remedy for coughs, colds, and sore throats. Its texture helps to soothe irritation in the throat, while its sweet taste and floral fragrance make it easier to drink than the average cough medicine.

The brewery's original owner, Yoshizawa Nitara (1863–1941), was a man of eccentric artistic tastes. These are evident in the design of the brewery storehouse, which uses colors and decorations rarely seen elsewhere in buildings from this time period. The garden is also unconventional in its design, as it incorporates volcanic rocks transported from Nagano Prefecture.

Settaya has a spiritual aspect, as well. The Michishirube Jizo statue at the main fork in the Old Mikuni Kaido (Highway) acts as both a good luck charm and a guide for travelers. The markings on either side of its base historically directed travelers and traders either southeast to Edo (present-day Tokyo) or northwest to the mountains.

At the Takekoma Inari Shrine, people doing business in the area or even just passing through can offer a prayer for prosperity. On the whole, Settaya is an example of how an area's history and traditions can serve its people in the present.