

Kehara Terraced Rice Paddies

In the foothills of the Oeyama mountain range lies a cluster of terraced rice paddies carved into the mountainous terrain. Built to maximize arable land, they have sustained the small agricultural village of Kehara since at least the Heian period (794–1185). There were once as many as 36 homes with 136 villagers living here, but today only 13 houses remain. The tight-knit community works collectively to preserve its way of life and encourage sustainability. It also welcomes in new members through a community farming rice paddy ownership system.

An observation deck near the top of the village offers sweeping views of the terraced landscape. The scenery is especially charming in early summer when rice seedlings emerge from the reflective pools of water, dotting the landscape in neat rows. One remaining thatched-roof house and a waterwheel accentuate the landscape with traditional architecture. Doves of fireflies illuminate the rice fields on summer nights, attracted to the clean mountain water.

The village also has painted *jizo* statues, a guest cottage, a brick pizza oven available by reservation, and a *doburoku* (unrefined sake) brewery. Rice-planting activities are held every spring, and in July and August, visitors can pick their own blueberries and blackberries. A walk through the village takes around 30 to 60 minutes. Visitors should note that the observation deck can only be reached on foot. Guided tours of Kehara are available with prior reservations.