

The Town of Kamikatsu

Kamikatsu is a small town in Tokushima Prefecture on the island of Shikoku. It is in the Tsurugi mountain range along the Katsuura River, about 40 kilometers southwest of the city of Tokushima. The town has only a single traffic light and not even one convenience store, yet it has gained global recognition for its approaches to modern challenges despite its small size and remote location.

Kamikatsu has the smallest population of any town on Shikoku, and has an area of 109.68 square kilometers. Forests make up 88.3 percent of the land, and 80 percent of those are cultivated forests mainly planted with Japanese cedar. The population is now around 1,500, with 53 percent over the age of 65 (as of 2020). The town is faced with a rapidly aging and shrinking population, like much of rural Japan, but has responded with fresh ideas that build on the town's heritage. One example is the introduction of hands-on activities at the rice terraces that have been preserved relatively unchanged since the seventeenth century. Elderly residents teach rice planting and thatched roof making, and pass on their knowledge and skills to younger generations as well as promote interest in rural living.

Many seniors also supply leaves, flowers, and buds used as decorative garnishes (*tsumamono*) for the restaurant market through a local business initiative known as Irodori. They receive online orders and ship garnishes suited to the season to restaurants.

The decline in population has also meant growing budgetary constraints. Kamikatsu made a pledge to achieve zero waste in 2003, in part because the town could not afford a large waste incineration facility. The local government, NPOs, residents, and others are working together toward a 100 percent recycling rate. They have implemented a rigorous waste separation system with 45 categories, and an accreditation system for shops that actively work to reduce waste. Kamikatsu has also initiated programs to encourage people from all over the world to visit and live in the town, including offering internships.