

## **Rice Terraces of Kashihara**

The terraced rice fields of Kashihara are between 500 and 700 meters in elevation and are some of the most famous in Japan. With their stone and earth walls, bamboo irrigation system, and historic water wheel, they are a living memorial to rich local history and offer a view into the traditional interplay between settlements and nature. They were selected for Japan's 100 Best Rice Terraces by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in 1999, and designated an Important Cultural Landscape by the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 2010.

### **Three Different Views**

The terraces of Kashihara are divided into three distinct levels: lower, middle, and upper Kashihara. All offer striking views, however lower Kashihara is the most popular for taking pictures. It has small paddies (around 190 square meters each) with curved ridges and is completely surrounded by mountains. Each season offers a variation on the scenery: in the spring, the sky is reflected in water-filled paddies; in late summer, rice bundles are hung and dried in the sun; in autumn, the maple foliage changes color; and in winter, the terraces are blanketed by occasional snow.

There are many earthen terrace walls in middle Kashihara, while stone walls are used in upper and lower Kashihara. The crevices of the dry stone walls are overgrown with plants and provide habitats for frogs, snakes, and insects in one of the many ways that the terraces contribute to biological diversity. Water is drawn from irrigation channels to the fields using bamboo gutters, and this water flows down from one paddy to another. Such water distribution demonstrates how this farming community has efficiently used limited natural resources. These aspects of local life and landscape have earned national recognition, and the rice terraces were designated an Important Satochi-Satoyama Site (characterized by interactions between settlements, secondary forest, rice paddies, and irrigation canals) by the Ministry of the Environment in 2015.

### **Rural Soundscape**

Most households in this settlement used a water wheel to polish rice as late as the early twentieth century. The watermills fell out of use and disappeared for a time, but one was restored in lower Kashihara in 1998. The sound of the watermill blends with the burbling of mountain streams and irrigation channels, the voices of farmers at work, and the chirping of wild birds to create a soundscape unique to the area.

### **Where to Stop for a Break**

The only rice terraces in Kamikatsu with public rest facilities are in Kashiara. In lower Kashiara, the Asakage-tei soba restaurant, café, and guesthouse has spectacular views of the terraces. There is a small rest house in middle Kashiara, and in upper Kashiara is a rest area called Mineda in an old, traditional house found at the Mt. Yamainu hiking trail entrance.