

Kouraku Kiln

Founded in 1865 by Tokunaga Kosuke (dates unknown), the Kouraku kiln is the trade name of the Tokunaga Porcelain Company. The company's current and fifth-generation president, Tokunaga Takanobu (b. 1967) is working to make Kouraku the friendliest and most approachable kiln in Arita. The company takes pride in creating pieces that inspire happiness and connect to Arita's history and community.

Kouraku kiln's production range has widened over the generations. In the first decades of the twentieth century, its focus was on creating *hibachi*, a simple type of charcoal brazier. By the 1930s the kiln produced tableware for the Japanese armed forces. After World War II, the company changed focus again to household wares and industrial ceramics, moving to their current location in 1962. Compared to many kilns in Arita, Kouraku was quick to install first fuel oil-fired, and then gas-fired, pottery kilns, increasing production capacity. At its peak, Kouraku employed more than 500 people. Today, the staff has shrunk to about 30 to 40 people, but the company continues to innovate, working with artists from around the world.

In 2013, Kouraku began an Artist in Residence program, the first of its kind in Arita. Artists are given access to studio space and materials and can work with the kiln's professional artisans and craftsmen to bring their ideas to life. Anyone interested in ceramics can learn about the entire production process, from design to marketing. Kouraku has an on-site guest house, and artists from around the world can collaborate and work together to offer new perspectives on creating Arita ware. Over one hundred artists have come to Japan to be a part of the program to date.

The main factory building was built from timber sourced from a defunct Meiji-era (1868–1912) elementary school. Part of the building has been transformed into an outlet shop and the location of the Treasure Hunting facility. The Treasure Hunting experience is one of Kouraku kiln's biggest draws. Pieces that were not, or could not be, sold were saved by the company rather than destroyed. Visitors are given a shopping basket and a time limit to fill the basket with as many pieces from the stacked crates as they would like. Two different experiences are offered: the basic hunt and the premium hunt, which includes more colorful and premium items. The choices are nearly endless. The pieces in the crates might be test pieces, surplus goods, or even past designs from over 20 years ago. Like the reuse of the Meiji school timber, the Treasure Hunt has been a good way to give old items new life. For Kouraku it is an efficient way to reduce stock that had been collecting dust in the kiln's warehouses for years, while giving porcelain fans a fun and accessible experience.