

Kumamoto Prefectural Traditional Crafts Center

This crafts center is located northeast of the castle and is dedicated to the promotion of local crafts. The large shop on the first floor stocks traditional crafts and the gallery on the second floor displays the officially designated crafts of Kumamoto.

The main crafts introduced in the gallery include the following:

- **Higo Inlay**

Higo zogan is decorative metalwork with silver and gold inlays on a base of engraved iron. The roots of the craft go back to the seventeenth century, when it flourished under the patronage of lord Hosokawa Tadaoki (1563–1646).

- **Ceramics**

Local ceramics on display include Shodai ware, Koda ware, and Amakusa ware, all craft traditions that are around 400 years old.

- **Folk Art**

The mainstay here is a display of Yamaga *toro* lanterns, large and elaborate paper recreations of shrines and pagodas. The lanterns are presented as shrine offerings, a 600-year-old tradition.

- **Folk toys**

The gallery displays popular traditional toys made in Kumamoto, including monkey figures made of clay (*konoha zaru*), dolls made of wood, and *higomari*, ornamental balls made of colored cotton string wound around a rice-hull core.

- **Practical Items**

Among the other items exhibited are useful objects like baskets and boxes made of woven bamboo, woodwork products from furniture to window transoms, and Kutami fans made of Japanese paper on a bamboo framework.

Continuing the traditions of a samurai town where swordsmiths were in demand, metalsmiths today produce high-quality cutting tools, from kitchen knives to garden shears. Large items on display include examples of decorative roof tiles in the shape of

demons and dragonfish, like those on the roof of the castle's two keeps, and large Japanese taiko drums carved out of wood.

Many of the items exhibited are accompanied by detailed explanations of how they are made, and some are available for visitors to handle. The museum shop on the first floor offers distinctive souvenirs of Kumamoto and sales helps support local crafts traditions.