

Nanbu Ironware (*Nanbu Tekki*)

Shizukuishi was formerly part of the Nanbu domain, which was an important center for the manufacture of high-quality iron products in the seventeenth century. This region was ruled by the Nanbu family from the Kamakura period (1185–1333) until the Meiji Restoration in 1868, and the items produced here came to be known as Nanbu ironware. Handmade kettles and pots, along with more ornamental products such as wind chimes, are still produced in the region.

It is thought that Koizumi Nizaemon, a skilled craftsman from Kyoto, introduced iron-casting techniques to the region in 1659. A member of the ruling Nanbu family wanted to promote culture and industry, and so Nizaemon was asked to move to what is now Iwate and set up production.

At the time, the kettles used in Japan's traditional tea ceremony had neither a handle nor a spout; hot water was taken out of the kettle with a bamboo ladle. Around 1750, the third generation of the Koizumi family developed a more convenient way to boil water by designing a small teakettle with a handle and spout. Over time, the iron teakettle grew in popularity as a symbol of the industry, and became known as *Nanbu tekki*. Thanks to the continued support of members of the Nanbu family, who were deeply interested in the tea ceremony, and a good supply of the materials needed for making iron, the local industry flourished.

Nanbu kettles and other handcrafted ironware are available from several studios and shops in Shizukuishi, including the Tourism and Produce Center in Shizukuishi Station. Some products combine the techniques for ironmaking with another specialty craft from Iwate Prefecture, Joboji lacquer, which originated in the town of Joboji. Lacquer, called *urushi* in Japanese, is made from the sap of the increasingly rare *urushi* tree. Most of the *urushi* used in Japan today comes from overseas, but Joboji lacquer is one of the few that is domestically produced; it is chiefly used in the restoration of national cultural treasures.

Visitors can try combining the two traditional crafts of Nanbu ironware and Joboji lacquer in hands-on workshops offered at one of the studios in Shizukuishi. Options include making original souvenirs such as jewelry and keychain holders.