

The History of Traditional Crafts in Ishikawa

Ishikawa Prefecture has long and robust craft traditions that encompass ceramics, textiles, lacquerware, metal work, and woodwork.

Ishikawa crafts underwent a period of rapid evolution and sophistication during the Edo period (1603–1867), thanks to the lords of what was then called Kaga domain. The ruling Maeda family was immensely wealthy, thanks to the domain's bountiful rice production, and they turned those resources to cultural pursuits. A workshop originally built for maintaining and repairing armor and weapons was converted into a multi-discipline crafts workshop where as many as 70 artisans practiced their crafts, trained successors, and collaborated on ornate masterworks for the Maedas. The lords also invited skilled artisans from around the country to relocate to Kanazawa, offering them land and generous monetary support. The characteristic techniques of Kaga *yūzen* silk dyeing, Kaga *maki-e*, Kaga metal inlay, and other renowned Ishikawa crafts developed during this time.

Meanwhile, enterprising merchants began distributing Kaga products well beyond the borders of the domain via coastal trading ships. These boats plied a route between Hokkaido and Osaka, stopping in many ports along the way. In addition to fertilizer, rice, and other staple commodities, they carried luxury items like lacquerware. Thanks to this commerce, and to the Maedas' custom of giving fine handicrafts as political gifts, the traditional crafts of Ishikawa earned a widespread reputation for quality and beauty that endures today.