

Ishikawa Traditional Crafts: An Introduction

For hundreds of years, the area now known as Ishikawa Prefecture has been a major center for handicrafts, rivaling the cultural capitals of Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo). The prefecture's thriving craft traditions encompass ceramics, textiles, lacquerware, metalwork, and woodwork. Many art forms practiced around Japan, such as swordsmithing and *yūzen* silk dyeing, evolved unique expressions in Ishikawa. Other techniques, such as Kaga metal inlay, originated in the area.

In recognition of their artistic and historical value, many of the art forms practiced in Ishikawa have been designated Important Intangible Cultural Heritage by the national government. By population, the prefecture is home to the most crafts-related Holders of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage—the master practitioners tasked with preserving the time-honored techniques that have been designated Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Today, visitors to Ishikawa can see not only masterworks from the past, but also modern artisans still plying their trades and finding new ways to adapt traditional techniques to a modern aesthetic. Contemporary works range from exquisite pieces of fine art destined for museums to daily items of functional beauty, like Kutani ware rice bowls or Wajima lacquer chopsticks. Some products remain ultra-traditional, such as the ceremonial gongs used in tea ceremony, while other crafts have found new expressions in the modern age. For example, the micron-thin gold leaf once applied to Buddhist statuary can now be found atop soft-serve ice cream and in high-end facial treatments.