

## **Blacksmithing and the Forges of Hitoyoshi**

Blacksmithing flourished in Hitoyoshi Kuma, peaking during the Edo period (1603–1867). Records from that time indicate there were 60 smithies operating in the Hitoyoshi castle town. Most were making and repairing agricultural tools as well as tools and hardware for farms, homes, and local industry.

Hitoyoshi's forges were located in the artisan quarter of the town, across the river from the castle in a district known as Kajiyamachi (literally “blacksmith town”). The name and boundaries of the district have been preserved, but no working blacksmith forges remain there. Visitors can walk the old district and get a feel for how it was laid out.

Modernization reduced Hitoyoshi's smithing industry to a handful of families. They preserve Hitoyoshi's smithing heritage for future generations and continue to forge tools by hand, without automated machinery, relying on exacting techniques and practiced expertise.

Hoes, sickles, and scythes for farming, as well as machetes, axes, and sledgehammers for forestry, were among some of the most common tools forged by Hitoyoshi blacksmiths. However, demand for such traditional tools has decreased with the advent of power tools and modern agricultural machinery, and the remaining smiths typically specialize in kitchen knives, leisure knives, and other cutting tools, including scissors. Most of these blacksmiths sell products directly from their workshops, so it may be possible to observe part of the forging process.