

Shiroyone Senmaida

Terraces cascade down a hillside towards the shore in a patchwork of more than one thousand rice fields in Shiroyone, on the Noto Peninsula, Ishikawa Prefecture. The Senmaida (literally “thousand rice fields”) terraces, ranging from 50 centimeters to around 18 meters square, are all cultivated by hand. Rice has been grown on this hillside since the early Edo period (1603–1867). A path runs around the perimeter of the fields so that visitors can get close without causing damage to the rice fields. At the information center and shop at the top of the hill, visitors can learn about traditional farming and buy rice grown in the fields.

Maximizing the available land

The climate of the Noto Peninsula is well suited for rice production, but flat land suitable for farming is scarce. Since at least the Edo period, farmers in the area have split their time between cultivating small plots of land and working in other industries such as fishing or forestry to make a living. Terraced rice fields were developed as a way to maximize rice production and prevent soil erosion. The paddies act as dams to retain water and sediment and thus require less fertilizer than flat fields.

Preserving agricultural heritage

While machinery such as small combine harvesters and threshing machines have become common in rice cultivation, the irregular shape and gradient of the Shiroyone terraces means that soil preparation, planting, and harvesting must be done by hand. Such practices have preserved agricultural traditions on the Noto Peninsula, which was designated a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) in 2011.