

## **Kayabuki no Sato, the Village of Thatched-Roof Houses**

Miyama has more than 200 buildings with traditional thatched roofs. The highest concentration of these buildings is in Kayabuki no Sato, a village where some 40 thatched-roof houses line a hillside overlooking farmland with forested mountains in the distance.

Footpaths winding between the houses lead to attractions such as the Miyama Folklore Museum, which occupies a reconstructed nineteenth-century farmhouse and is one of the few places where visitors can view the area's traditional architecture from the inside. Another house open to the public is the Little Indigo Museum, in a residence from 1796 that is the oldest extant structure in Kayabuki no Sato. The village is the most visited place in Miyama and hosts events such as the annual Snow Lantern Festival. English-speaking guides provide tours that offer an in-depth overview of the village's history and culture.

The historic houses and traditional environment are maintained by the residents, who work to protect the structures and the vibrancy of the community. Kayabuki no Sato was designated a Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings in 1993, ensuring the village's conservation by mandating the maintenance of its buildings in their original state. This upkeep includes periodically rethatching the roofs. The residents of Kayabuki no Sato cover the associated costs and provide employment opportunities for local youth by jointly funding a company that operates businesses such as restaurants and souvenir shops in the village.

Most thatched-roof houses in Kayabuki no Sato are between 150 and 200 years old. Each one is rethatched every few decades in a labor-intensive undertaking that starts with growing the miscanthus grass (*susuki*) used as thatch. Each household used to have its own grass field for this purpose, but residents now share a field across the Yura River from the village. The grass is harvested in late autumn, before the snowy season, and bundled for drying in the open in winter before being stored indoors from the following spring. The attics of the farmhouses traditionally doubled as grass storerooms, but nowadays a communal warehouse is used instead.

Thatching used to be a cooperative effort that involved the entire village but is now carried out by professionals using locally grown miscanthus grass. The work is usually

done in spring or summer, and the grass from old roofs can be reused as fertilizer. Larger houses are often rethatched in sections, with work on one side typically carried out in one year and the other side the following year.