

## **The Little Indigo Museum**

The history of indigo dyeing can be explored in the picturesque surroundings of the Little Indigo Museum in Kayabuki no Sato. The museum occupies the largest thatched-roof farmhouse in the village, built on high ground in 1796 for the Nakano family, who were the hereditary village headman. The family's high status is reflected in the sizable stone walls built to fortify the terraced ground the house stands on and the small but exquisite garden.

The building's current owner is Kyoto-born artist Shindo Hiroyuki. He moved to Miyama with his family in 1981, purchasing the Nakano house and converting the historic property into a dyeing studio. Shindo first learned about indigo dyeing during his studies at the Kyoto City University of Arts in the late 1960s and has been dedicated to the craft ever since. He chose the town for its pure groundwater and because the rural environment made it possible to burn large quantities of wood for ash, a key ingredient in the fermentation process through which indigo leaves are transformed into dye. In 2005, he opened a museum displaying his collection of indigo-dyed items from around the world to share the history of the art form with visitors to Kayabuki no Sato.

From the museum entrance, it is possible to peek into Shindo's studio in the next room, where vats filled with inky blue dye are set into the floor. The dye contains no synthetic chemicals and can be used as fertilizer once it has outlived its main purpose. It is indeed used in the Shindo family's vegetable patch. The spent indigo has antibacterial properties and acts as an insect repellent.

These benefits, not to mention the vivid shades of blue and purple, have made indigo a treasured dye worldwide for thousands of years. This history can be explored at Shindo's museum, set in the house's attic, which formerly was used to store the dried grass used to rethatch the roof. It now displays a rotating selection of pieces from the artist's collection of hundreds of indigo items. Admission is 300 yen.