

Ishida House

The thatched-roof Ishida House is the oldest extant farmhouse in Japan, built in 1650 for a wealthy family who held the hereditary position of village headman. The family lived in the house until 1972, when the building was designated an Important Cultural Property and restored to its seventeenth-century appearance using original construction materials.

The Ishida House exemplifies the Kitayama style of farmhouse architecture that developed in the villages north of Kyoto in the early seventeenth century. Kitayama houses are square with wooden walls and a slightly raised earthen-floored entrance area. In the oldest buildings of this style, including the Ishida House, the entrance is on the gable side next to a cattle stall. The first room after the entrance area, and the largest in the house, is the kitchen and living room, centered on an *irori* sunken fireplace. Beyond the living room are a tatami-mat room primarily used for receiving guests, a Buddhist family altar, and the rooms where family members slept on straw.

The house's hip-and-gable roof has a bamboo framework held together by ropes rather than nails. Below is a windowless attic used to store dried grass for roof rethatching, which must be done every few decades. The roof consists of three layers: a thick outer section of water-resistant miscanthus grass (*susuki*); a middle layer of rice straw, an inexpensive material available to farmers in large quantities; and a thin base of peeled hemp stalks that support the outer layers. This traditional three-layer structure was once common throughout the Kitayama region but now remains in use mainly on historic buildings. The owners of private residences usually prefer roofs thatched entirely with miscanthus grass because they are more durable.

Note that the Ishida House is located on the western edge of Miyama near the Ono Dam and can only be reached conveniently by car. It is open to the public between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. on weekends and public holidays from March to November.