**Former Aikawa Detention Center**

Ivy-covered concrete walls and a rusting gate enclose an old jailhouse at the top of Aikawa’s historic hillside Kyōmachi neighborhood. Aikawa Detention Center shut down in 1972, having served as a local branch of the Niigata prison system since 1954. Today, it stands empty and silent. Visitors are free to unlatch the bolts at the top and bottom of the door and go inside. The interior is clean and bright, lit by skylights and large windows, yet it feels eerily frozen in time. The concrete hallways and weed-ridden yard are quiet and peaceful. No guards stand outside the security doors, and no inmates pace the tatami-floored cells whose doors lie open and inviting.

The jail’s main detention wing comprises six cells, one of which was reserved for women, in addition to a bath, a kitchen, and a library. Offices and a visitation area are found in the smaller entrance wing. The jail could hold 18 detainees at a time. Most were suspects awaiting the results of their trials, but the kitchen was staffed by convicts. A police station and a courthouse were located nearby.

Few jailhouses of this age and type remain in Japan, and Aikawa Detention Center has been nationally registered as a Tangible Cultural Property. Visitors can linger in the jailhouse as long as they like, provided they lock the front door again when they leave.