

Rice-Straw Handicrafts

Many of the objects used in daily life, such as sandals and mats, were handmade with rice straw (*wara*). One example is the straw sandals known as *ashinaka*. Their name, which literally means “half foot,” reflects their typical length—the sandals covered only the toes and upper foot, leaving the heel exposed. The reduced size allowed villagers to conserve rice straw, which was precious in this mountainous region because of the difficulty of cultivating rice.

Rice straw was also used to make rope, mats, backpacks, boots, and gaiters. Crafting such everyday items was typically considered the work of men, who performed it during the snowy winter months when working outdoors was difficult. A villager would go through some 40 pairs of *ashinaka* per year, and replacing them required many hours of labor by the light of evening fires.

Visitors to the Gasshozukuri Minkaen Open-Air Museum can try weaving their own *ashinaka*. A workshop is held inside a *gasshō*-style house and takes about two hours. Sessions can be booked at the museum’s information desk. During the workshop, participants create a single *ashinaka* with a decorative loop that can be used to display the sandal as a memento.