

Okuizumo Tatara and Sword Museum

The Okuizumo Tatara and Sword Museum presents the history of *tatara* ironmaking and the ongoing practice of traditional swordsmithing. Okuizumo is the only place where the *tatara* smelting method is still practiced, and this museum is one of several facilities dedicated to the region's ironmaking heritage.

The *tatara* method of ironmaking is unique to Japan and dates to the latter half of the sixth century. A charcoal-fed clay furnace is used to smelt iron sand over the course of several days, producing a multi-ton mass of iron, slag, and steel called a "bloom." This method is the only way to produce *tamahagane* steel, which is prized by Japanese swordsmiths.

The exhibits in the first half of the museum introduce the rise and eventual decline of the *tatara* method. The museum's second half focuses on contemporary efforts to revive *tatara* smelting to create steel for modern swordsmiths. *Tatara* ironmaking was more than a production method; it was also an industry that shaped the cultures of Okuizumo and the broader San'in region (Shimane and Tottori Prefectures).