

## Welcome to Wakou Museum

Wakou Museum is dedicated to the history and development of the *tatara* furnace, a tool for smelting iron and steel that was developed in Japan and used widely in this region.

Before exploring the exhibits, visitors are encouraged to first stop by the museum theater and view a 15-minute film explaining the *tatara* ironmaking process. This short documentary shows the smelting operation at Nittōho Tatara, the only ironworks in the world where steel is smelted using a clay *tatara* furnace. The film shows how simple materials, such as clay, iron sand, and charcoal, are used to produce a high-grade steel called *tamahagane*. English subtitles are available upon request.

The exhibit rooms on the first and second floors present the history of ironworking innovation in the region.

The technology for smelting iron ore arrived in Japan sometime in the late sixth century, and it was soon adapted for smelting iron sand, which was more readily available. Seeking to maximize both output and quality, ironworkers found large-scale sources of raw materials and designed more powerful bellows and furnaces. Later advancements in modern steelmaking in the twentieth century gave rise to the creation of Yasugi Specialty Steel, a new variety of steel renowned for its hardness and durability that is still produced locally. Yasugi Steel is thus the most recent chapter in this centuries-long history.