

Out of the Quiet of the Mountains, a River Flows

The town of Kawakami is tucked away at the highest reaches of the Yoshino River (known also as the Kinokawa River), high enough that the river is not yet a river at all. Instead, dozens of mountain streams trickle down through old-growth broadleaf forests into an ever-larger rush of cold, clean water.

Kawakami is a place of deep valleys and lush woods, of expansive overlooks and ancient limestone caverns. Above all, it is a place whose residents have a deep understanding of the natural beauty that surrounds them and their responsibility to preserve it.

Kawakami's history lies in forestry. For 500 years, it has provided the strong, unblemished cedar wood that the area is famous for. The town oversees one of the oldest planted forests in the country, and a 400-year-old cedar stands in silent testimony to the townspeople's careful cultivation of woodland resources. Local forestry practices prioritize the hardiness and beauty of the wood over its quantity, and local artists turn that wood into

creative handicrafts.

Nature education, particularly concerning the relationship between forest and water, is important to the people of Kawakami. The community offers an impressive number of guided activities that range from catching *amago* trout barehanded to caving with ropes and headlamps. Other, more relaxing activities include soaking in a mountain hot spring and pottery-making at the artists' community workshop.

A bus runs from Yamato Kamiichi Station to central Kawakami, but the town is best explored by car. Car rental companies operate in nearby cities, and most will rent vehicles to holders of a domestic or international driver's license.