

Mikawa Cotton and the Takeshima Craft Center

Gamagori's association with cotton is said to go back to antiquity, and the cotton fabric and garment industry was the lifeblood of the area for centuries. This history is on display at the Takeshima Craft Center, where traditional textile-making techniques can also be experienced.

According to ancient chronicles, the cotton plant was introduced to Japan in the eighth century when a ship carrying a traveler from the Indian subcontinent washed ashore in what is now the municipality of Nishio, just west of Gamagori. The cotton seeds carried by this visitor are said to have provided the impetus for the first attempts to grow the plant in Japan. Domestic cotton cultivation did not take off until the sixteenth century, but when it did, the Mikawa area (the eastern half of today's Aichi Prefecture, including Gamagori) quickly established itself as a major producer.

The local cotton industry flourished from the seventeenth century when cotton garments became affordable enough to be widely worn by ordinary people. Mikawa cotton and the distinctive striped pattern used by

local textile-makers garnered acclaim during the Meiji era (1868–1912). In Gamagori, the height of textile production came during the years immediately following World War II, when factories and workshops in and around the city turned out textiles and garments at a rapid pace to meet nationwide demand for affordable fabric.

Although the textile industry is no longer a significant economic factor in Mikawa, the heritage and traditional process of cotton production remain a source of local pride. This legacy can be explored at the Takeshima Craft Center, where instructors offer a step-by-step class in making a cotton drink coaster with Mikawa techniques. Participants learn how to separate cotton fiber from seed cotton, how to turn the cotton into thread, and how to weave their coaster on a traditional hand-operated loom.

The Takeshima Craft Center is located in the Shunzeien garden near

Hotel Takeshima and the bridge to the island of Takeshima.