

## **Koka Medicine Museum**

Medicinal herbs have been an important part of the Koka area's history.

The ninja possessed detailed knowledge of such plants and were proficient at combining them to create medicines. Visit the Koka Medicine Museum to learn about the ninja's use of herbs and the history of Koka's connection to medicine.

The museum's permanent exhibition showcases tools for making medicines and advertisements for medicines from the Edo period (1603–1867) to the Showa era (1926–1989), tracing the history of medicine sales and production in Koka. Interactive displays explore medicinal herbs and offer a comprehensive look at the development of Koka's medicine-related industry up to the present.

The ninja made *shinobi-gusuri* (lit., “ninja medicine”) from herbs, drawing on their skills in herbal medicine. In 1676, a member of the Fujibayashi

ninja family created the *Bansenshukai*, a compilation of *ninjutsu* (ninja arts) from the Koka (Shiga Prefecture) and Iga (Mie Prefecture) areas. The volume describes various medicines, some of which were meant to ease common ailments when ninja were traveling on missions. They also made substances to sicken or weaken enemies or silence dogs whose barking might give away their presence on missions.

For a small fee, visitors to the Koka Medicine Museum can try their hand at creating a simple dish similar to what ninja might have eaten when they needed a boost of energy. The workshop is suitable for all ages. Advanced bookings are required, so please contact the Tourism Information Center at the Kokaryu Real Ninjakan or Koka Medicine Museum for more information.

Another interesting display in the museum is detailed information outlining the close links between ninja and *yamabushi* (practitioners of Shugendo mountain asceticism). Both ninja and *yamabushi* trained in the

mountains of the Koka area and were very knowledgeable about the environment.

In the early Edo period, *yamabushi* from the Koka area made medicines and offered them to temples. Later, some of these ascetics became traveling medicine salesmen. When they distributed medicines to households, they operated on a “use first, pay later” business model. Moreover, they would pick up unused medicine at a later time and charge only for the portion of medication that had been used.

One of the primary skills of the ninja was obtaining information about the weak points of enemies, so impersonating a traveling medicine salesman was an ideal cover for them. Disguised and carrying medicine, a ninja could gain access to a household and collect information about an enemy’s lifestyle, habits, and health, all of which could be used to the ninja’s advantage.