

MIKAWACHI
POTTERY
CENTRE

Visitors' Guide



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'Dami' – infilling with cobalt blue



Shading creates solidity and perspective

Underglaze Blue

Skilful detail and shading
create naturalistic images



This is a technique of painting indigo-coloured designs onto a white bisque ground using a brush soaked in cobalt blue pigment called *gosu*. The process of painting the outline of motifs onto biscuit-fired pieces and adding colour is called *etsuke*. Filling in the outlined areas with cobalt blue dye is specifically known as *dami*. The pot is turned on its side, and a special *dami* brush steeped in *gosu* is used to drip the coloured pigment so it soaks into the horizontal surface. The bare bisque surface is highly absorbent, so it is necessary to keep the *dami* brush constantly in motion.

Underglaze blue work at Mikawachi is described as being “just like a painting”. When making images on pottery, abbreviations and changes occur naturally as the artist repeats the same motif many times over – it becomes stylised and settles into an established ‘pattern’. At Mikawachi, however, the painted designs do not pass through this transformation; they are painted just as a two-dimensional work, brushstroke by brushstroke. This is why painterly techniques, like colour gradation in the cobalt pigment expressing solidity and perspective, continue to play an important role.

Chinese Children

Happy children
at play Symbols of
prosperity



Bringing out a sense of solidity with *dami* shading



Left: Children's faces differ according to the studio
 Right: The eyes are painted in last of all



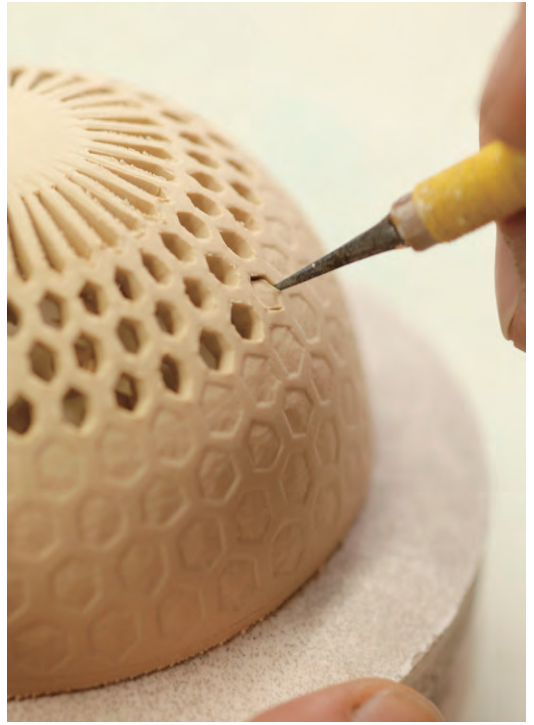
Cute Chinese children, playing joyfully, are a characteristic motif found on Mikawachi Ware. In China the birth of many boy-babies is considered a symbol of good fortune, and children at play – suggestive of happiness and prosperity – have been used as a painting subject since the Tang Dynasty (8th century). In the Ming Era (1368-1664), around the time that Japanese Mikawachi Ware was first developed, Chinese artists often used underglaze blue or overglaze polychrome enamels to portray this subject on ceramics.

At Mikawachi, Tanaka Yohē Naotoshi, painter for the *daimyō*-sponsored kiln, is said to have adopted the motif

from Ming Chinese underglaze blue ware around 1661. One well-known scene shows Chinese children frolicking with butterflies under a pine tree. Apparently the *daimyō*-sponsored workshop also produced dishes depicting Chinese children together with Taihu stones (porous limestone) and peonies, and a linked chakra (royal wheel) motif around the rim.

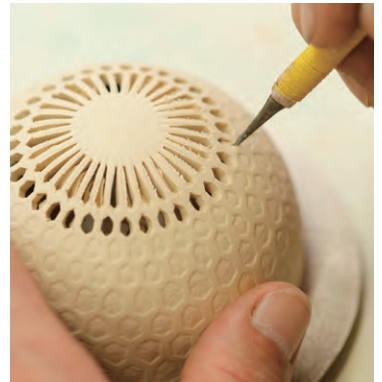
In the Meiji period (from 1868) painters began to add their individual touches to the Chinese child design, and their expressions and appearance varied a lot. These joyful, appealing children's images continue to be produced to this day.





Openwork Carving

Light, airy,
stylish workmanship



The piece dries out increasingly quickly as holes are opened up, so the carver has to keep working without a pause

A type of traditional workmanship using an intricate technique where parts of the surface are carved out to create the pattern. The entire openwork design has to be carved directly out of the body of the piece before the clay dries out, but each new hole in the clay makes the form more unstable, so the work has to proceed with a very careful calibration of the overall balance.

This process does weaken the pot itself; Mikawachi has developed openwork to the limits of what is possible, carving out the entire surface of a pot in the manner of basket-weave. From the 17th century right through to the 19th and early 20th centuries, Mikawachi artists continued to create pieces with ever more complex techniques.



Decorative techniques where shapes are created in the same clay as the base clay, using a variety of hand-crafted methods. At Mikawachi we create realistic, lifelike animals and plants which spring from the surfaces of the pots. Dragons, lions and chrysanthemums are among the motifs which have been passed down from one generation to the next, to be used not on table crockery but on ornamental pieces.

These flourished throughout the 19th and beginning of the 20th century: in the Edo period (until 1868) these were made as offerings and gifts from the Hirado Domain, and after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 a large number were produced to exhibit at International Expositions as a display of technical achievement.

Hand-forming

**Adding the vitality of animals
and plants to pottery**



Left: Intricate small parts are assembled to create the powerful horns, mouth and arms
Above: A cricket atop a Chinese cabbage

The ceramic chrysanthemum flower is one type of hand-crafted decorative element. Using a sharp-tipped bamboo tool, the shapes of the flower petals are cut out one by one from a lump of clay. Once the artist has a circle of petals, these are then carved in high relief. This process is then repeated several times to create the chrysanthemum form which is attached to jars, plates and bottles as decoration.

When carved, the individual petals stand up very sharply, but once the piece has been glazed and fired it softens to take on the appearance of a natural chrysanthemum.

Hand-crafted chrysanthemums

A white flower emerges as each petal is carved out



The petals are carved out one by one





Relief work

Building up layers – making solid ceramics look soft

This relief work technique known as *okiage* is used to apply three-dimensional designs to vessels; it is an ancient Japanese technique found in Muromachi period (14th to 16th century) Seto Ware from Aichi prefecture, and Momoyama period (late 16th century) Raku Ware from Kyoto prefecture.

At Mikawachi *okiage* is produced by applying layers of diluted white slip with a brush to gradually build up the image. It is characterised by velvety smooth lines and textures, like layers of soft fabric on the hard porcelain surface. Perfected in the Meiji period (1868-1912), it was used on jars and bowls during the Taishō (1912-26) and early Shōwa periods (from 1926).



Eggshell Porcelain

Translucent vessels full of
tense fragility



Demitasse cup
by Nakazato Yōzan, 1947

After the thin form is thrown on the wheel, it is further trimmed away

The decoration is carried out just as meticulously as the shaping



This is very fine ceramic ware of less than a millimetre in thickness which shines like a bulb when held up to a light source.

Lightweight, thin ceramics have been made a Mikawachi since the end of the Edo period (mid 19c); best known are the lidded rice bowls and coffee cups for export. These were known by the Chinese term *botai* (pronounced *bakutai* in Japanese) or *rankakude*, taken from the English name 'eggshell'.

It is very rare to find painted decoration on eggshell porcelain because any moisture from the paint absorbed by the unglazed surface would disturb the balance of the piece and cause warping. This illustrates the extreme delicacy of the vessels.

A walker's guide
to the
pottery studios

The History of Mikawachi Ware



Broken plates with *egaratsu* (iron painted) designs, early Edo period (17th century), from Yoshi-no-motogama Kiln Site (Kihara), Sasebo City Collection



Distant view of Hario Island



Small plate with underglaze blue chrysanthemum design, Edo period (approx. mid 17th century), Sasebo City Collection

Mikawachi Begins – the late 16th century

According to one theory, the history of Mikawachi Ware began with Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasions of Korea at the end of the 16th century (the Imjin War, 1592-1597). Returning to Japan from this campaign, the ruler of the Hirado Domain, Matura Shigenobu, brought Korean potter Koseki back with him, and a kiln was founded in Nakano (today's Hirado City, Nagasaki prefecture). This was one element in the birth of Mikawachi Ware.

Another factor was the influx of potters from Karatsu. Karatsu Ware, which sprung up in the same period in the north of Saga prefecture, developed rapidly with the advent of potters from the Korean peninsula. Hata, the local overlord at the time, fell foul of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (Japan's supreme com-

mander) and had his land confiscated, so Karatsu potters were dispersed to other areas throughout Kyūshū. One destination where they settled was today's Mikawachi, Sasebo City (Kihara and Enaga districts).

From the first white vessels to *daimyō*-sponsored kiln

Mikawachi originally produced earthenware and other porous-clay work but switched to making white porcelain around 1640. The trigger for this occurred when Koseki's son Imamura Sannojo discovered pottery stone on Hario Island in 1633 (Ajiro pottery stone). In 1637 the Hirado Domain appointed Sannojo as Master Potter – both the director and administrator of the pottery – and established Mikawachi as a *daimyō*-sponsored kiln.



Plate with underglaze blue motif of bamboo and sparrows, Edo period (end of 17th – beginning of 18th century), Sasebo City Collection



Sake bottle with underglaze blue design of chrysanthemum and autumn grasses, Edo period (first half of the 18th century), Sasebo City Collection

In 1650 the Hirado Domain moved all the Nakano potters to Mikawachi and its status as a daimyō-sponsored kiln was firmly established. The resulting patronage of the domain enabled Mikawachi to use high quality raw materials and advanced techniques, with the Eastern Kiln Studio and Western Kiln Studio playing the major roles.

From 1662 Sannojo's son Imamura Yajibē (Joen) began to use Amakusa pottery stone as an ingredient in the clay, and porcelain manufacture was firmly established.

It was also around this time that decorative techniques like openwork and relief sculpting emerged.

A high reputation for foreign exports

In contrast with non-sponsored kilns, the generous

support of Hirado Domain allowed Mikawachi to disregard profit margins and concentrate on honing elaborate workmanship. Its products were noted for their outstanding technical quality and until around 1789-1800 Mikawachi Ware was only produced for gifts, with sales strictly prohibited and production methods kept a closely guarded secret. Hiraga Gennai, states in his book *A Compendium of Pottery Techniques (Tōki Kufūsho, 1771)* that if Mikawachi Ware had been traded in the same way as Imari and Karatsu Ware, it would surely have been in great demand from the Chinese and the Dutch.

Export began around 1804. Initial export items consisted of coffee cups, unfamiliar to the Japanese. Craftsmen at Mikawachi – Ikeda Anjirō, Takahashi Heisuke, Nakazato Jūtarō and Yoshikawa Shōsaku developed coffee cups and wine cups in pure white



Elephant ornament in white porcelain, Edo period (19th century), Sasebo City Collection



Water jar with underglaze blue design of Chinese children, Edo period (first half of the 18th century), Sasebo City Collection

ultra-thin porcelain known as 'eggshell'. These were exported together with ornaments in animal or human form called *hineri zaiku* (literally 'twisted craftwork') and openwork pieces.

The wealthy Arita merchant, Hisatomi Yojibē, noticed the technical prowess and high international reputation of Mikawachi Ware and began to order eggshell porcelain teacups in 1841, adding overglaze polychrome-enamel decoration at Arita and exporting them, signed "made by Zōshuntei Sanpo". These continued to be exported to America, and to Holland and other European countries, through the late 19th and early 20th centuries right up to around 1950. In Japan too, prior to the period of rapid economic growth, this porcelain was used regularly in locations including the Japanese Star Chamber, albeit in small quantities, and continued to be highly regarded by connoisseurs for its fine, delicate workmanship.

Nakazato Yōzan (Suetarō)

One of the potters to make his name in the mid 20th century is Nakazato Yōzan (Suetarō).

He was born in 1897 in Mikawachi, and after graduation from the Design Department of Arita Technical High School, studied traditional ceramics techniques in Arita and Kyoto. His superb painting skills won him the position of purveyor to the Imperial Household, and he produced a large number of vessel designs including underglaze blue vines, auspicious motifs, plant scrolls, and landscapes.

The Yōzan Kiln Studio which he directed was appointed purveyor to the Imperial Household in 1928. He also exported to the USA. Yōzan's porcelain vessels might at first glance appear to follow European models, but their shape, balance and fineness is grounded in the Mikawachi tradition, and embodies modern Mikawachi techniques whilst simultaneously displaying Yōzan's own unrivalled territory.



Bowls and plates with chrysanthemum crest, Nakazato Yōzan

Tea set made for export, Nakazato Yōzan, 1947



- 1897 | Born in the village of Oriose, Nagasaki prefecture, the 3rd son of Nakazato Morisaburō.
- 1914 | Graduated from the Design Department of Saga Prefectural Arita Technical High School, then taught at Mikawachi Institute of Ceramics Design whilst studying traditional techniques in Arita and Kyoto.
- 1924 | Returned to his hometown and worked on ceramics production in his family tradition.
- 1927 | The Shōwa emperor was enthroned. The studio received an order for tableware to be used at the Imperial Enthronement Banquet; Yōzan was in charge of the ceramic painting.
- 1928 | The Yōzan Kiln Studio was appointed purveyor to the Imperial Household.
- 1947 | Set up Yōzan Hakuji Limited (Yōzan White Porcelain Ltd). Began exporting to American companies.
- 1948 | Nagasaki prefecture designated Yōzan a holder of intangible cultural property for his mastery of eggshell ceramics techniques.
- 1991 | Passed away.



Mikawachi-ware Glossary and Tools

This is a guide to techniques and terms used since early times at Mikawachi and the Hizen area of Kyūshū.

These techniques, existing only at Mikawachi and Hizen, and different to those of Seto and Kyoto, have given rise to a unique types of pottery, reflected in the language we use.

A

Ajiro pottery stone

Stone used for making porcelain, discovered in 1633 by Imamura Sannōjō at Mitsuwa, Hario Island, Sasebo City. Blending this with Amakusa pottery stone led to the creation of Mikawachi white porcelain.



Amakusa pottery stone

The most important ingredient in Japanese porcelain, used both in the clay body and the glazes. A large quantity is extracted in the northern part of Shimoshima in Amakusa; it was originally utilised for grindstones but its use as an ingredient in porcelain is said to have been discovered in the mid 17th century.

B

Boshi

A container used to hold pots in the kiln to protect them from flames and ash from firewood during firing. Made of pottery, these may be round or square. Other pottery-making centres call these *sayu* or *engoro*.

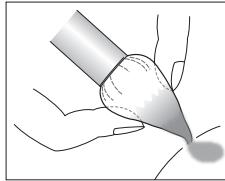


Front right: *boshi* Front left: A pot inside the *boshi*
The small round items at the back are *hama*

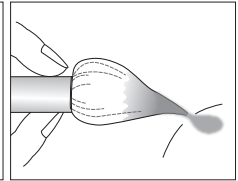
D

Dami

Dami refers to colouring-in and shading after a design has been outlined; the specialist artisan doing this is known as the *damite*. *Dami* may be heavy or light; a large 'dami-brush' is used to create shading through gradations of thick and thin paint that give a sense of solidity and perspective. A particular feature of the Mikawachi process is the way that the brush is laid on its side and *gosu* pigment allowed to flow onto, and soak into, the surface of the pot, unlike the usual method of squeezing the brush as it touches the surface, found at Arita and other studios.



Arita



Mikawachi

E

Ekakisan

An independent craftsman who makes his/her living as a ceramics painter.

G

Gosu

A mineral containing cobalt compounds, used as an indigo blue colorant for underglaze blue. It takes several days to grind down and dissolve in liquid for use. *Gosu* was imported from China via the port of Dejima in Nagasaki.



H

Hama

A biscuit fired clay stand, placed underneath pots in the kiln to minimise warping during firing. Many kiln studios on Honshū call these *tochin*.



Hera

Wooden spatulas used to stretch clay when throwing. There are 3 main types: *oshibera* (the potter's rib), *sashibera* (the pin) and *hosobera* (narrow spatula).

J

Jōhaku / Taihaku

Ceramic ware produced at a *daimyō*-sponsored kiln. Particularly outstanding items were known as *jōtaihaku*.

K

Kana

A steel tool used for trimming ceramic vessels. There separate *kana* for large trimming jobs and small ones; they are used to trim the outside of just-dried untreated pots, and to turn footings.



Kamazumi

The task of packing items into the kiln. In other regions this is often called *kama-ire*.

Kiryoma

A thread used to slice pots off the wheel after throwing. Horses' tail hair is considered to make the highest quality *kiryoma*, but the twisted core of a straw strand was often used.



Kurumaya

Also known as *kijiya*. A craftsperson specialised in throwing.

M

Mizubuki

Before the shaped pots are packed in the kiln, ladies wiped them with wet cotton cloth. This process filled cracks in the dried clay which was then polished to give the surface a smooth finish.

S

Shaku

A cross-shaped bamboo or wooden ruler used to measure the dimensions of a vessel: its depth, diameter and so on. Other kiln studios call this *tonbo* or *atari shaku*.



Sujiguruma

A small hand-powered potters' wheel used when drawing lines, painting, and carrying out other decoration.

Y

Yusubai

Ash from *yusu* wood was mixed into the glaze to beautifully enhance its lustre. This has long been an indispensable element in Kyūshū porcelain.





The workshop in the Meiji Era (1868-1912). Men are sitting cross-legged, throwing (front). Another is doing trimming work



The kick-wheel. Today most of the potters' wheels are electric, but in those days they were rotated with the foot (1957)

**Scenes from
the
Workshop,
19th-20th
centuries**

Trimming using a *kana* (1957)





When glazing, potters blow on the piece to even out irregularities (1957)



Perfecting a spout (1957)



Boshi are piled high in front of the kiln (1957)

Emptying the kiln; a coal-fired kiln can be seen in the background (1957)



Festivals

at Mikawachi Pottery

OKUNCHI

25th October

The largest festival in Mikawachi, dedicated to Sugawara Michizane, known as 'Mikawachi Okunchi'. Its name originates in the fact that 'kunchi' means 'day 9'; in ancient China odd numbers were considered positive and even numbers negative, so the largest single-digit odd number '9' was selected for festival dates.

'Nagasaki Kunchi' festival, held on the 9th day of the 9th month of the old calendar, is well known; Mikawachi was formerly part of the Hirado Domain and so brought its festival date in line with 'Hirado Kunchi' in late October.

At festival time, sacred ropes are hung all around the streets where the deities pass through the Mikawachi pottery-producing region. On the eve of the main festival shrines hold religious services and the Hirado Kagura (Shinto dance and music) is performed. On the main festival day there is a religious service, *kagura* dancing, and sea bream, pink-and-white rice cakes, and agricultural products are offered to the gods. A lively procession parades around the area, the central palanquin transporting the deity accompanied by sword-bearers, comedians, festival floats and dancers. Prayers are offered at all large and small shrines en route, local representatives pay their respects at the shrine, special presentations of *kagura* and dance take place, and the deities are returned to their resting place on the same day.





HAMAZEN FESTIVAL

1st – 5th May annually

The *hama* is a ceramic support, placed under pots when they are fired in order to prevent warping in the kiln. Once they have served been used once, the *hama*'s role is over and they are discarded. Since 1968 the Hamazen Festival has been held to conduct a service of thanks to the *hama*, and to foster interaction between the ceramics workshops and the local community. The term 'hamazen' originates in the fact that the *hama* resembles a four-legged tray for festive food called *ozen*. At the Pottery Shrine, Tōso Jinja, Imamura Yajibē, the son of Imamura Sannojo who established the *daimyō*-sponsored kiln of Mikawachi, is enshrined as a deity; the Imamura Family holds the Tōso Festival in his honour on April 15th. The Hamazen Festival follows in this tradition.

On the first day of the festival, newly made *hama* are offered to the shrine, and a service is conducted. During the festival period all the kiln studios hold their own exhibition and sale. Visitors walk around many historic sites and pottery workshops, and enjoy shopping for ceramics.

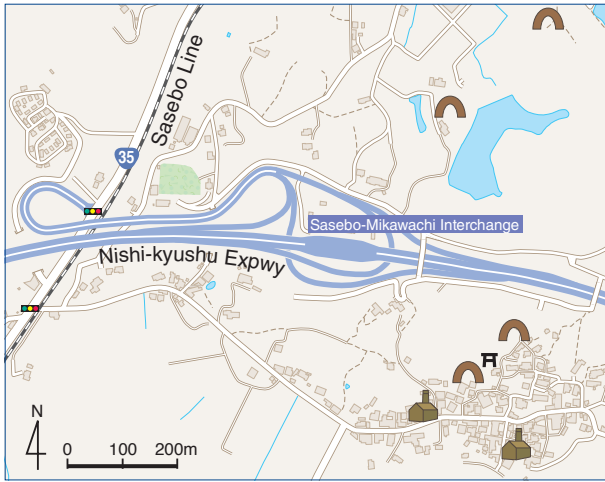
Pottery workshops line up next year's new products

THE CERAMICS FAIR

around 10th October annually

Held every year in early October in the square in front of Mikawachi ware Traditional Industry Hall in Mikawachi Honmachi. More than 50 special tents are set up by pottery studios and traders selling more than 500,000 items from everyday crockery to applied art objects at low prices. There are also popular events like the lottery draw and ceramics auction, and the town is buzzing with shoppers.





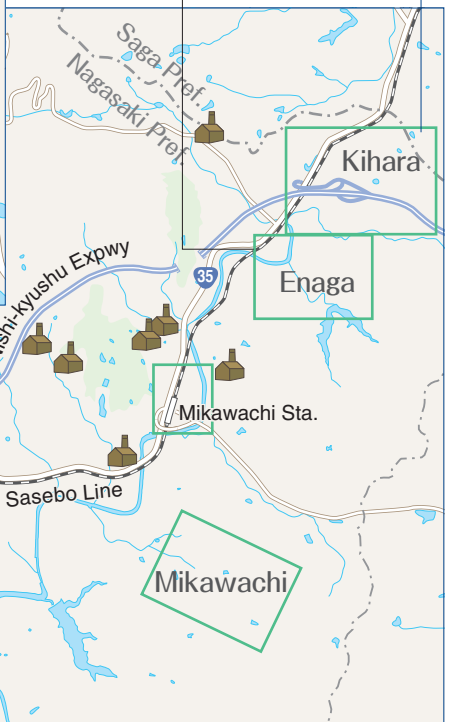
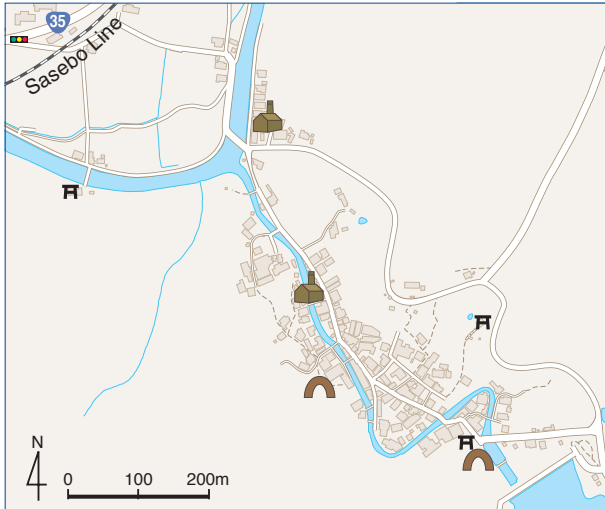
Kihara

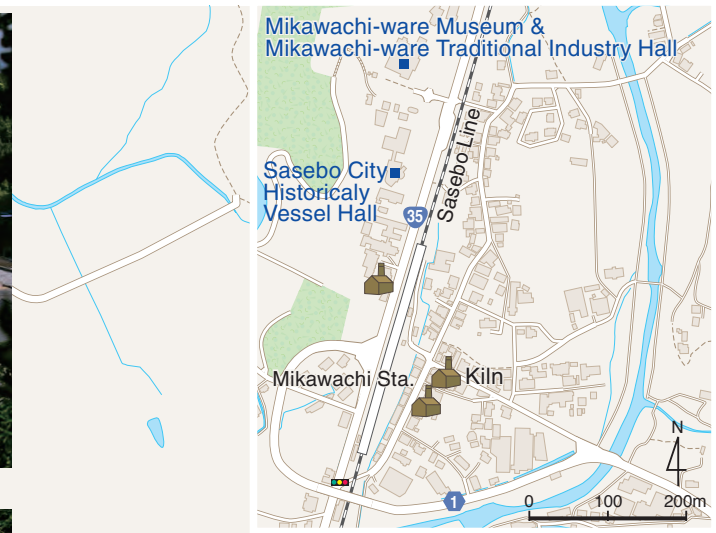
In this region are very important ancient kiln sites like Yoshi-no-Motogama and Yanagi-no-Motogama, built by potters who moved from Karatsu between 1596 and 1644. These illustrate the initial phase of Mikawachi Ware, when pottery making shifted from iron-painted pottery to porcelain.

Visitors' Map

Enaga

In 1643 administrative branch offices for the pottery were set up here at Enaga and at Kihara. At that time the pottery made porcelain for export; they later expanded to produce hakeme bowls (with decorative brushstrokes) for the domestic market, and general-use porcelain.





Taiheiya: this is the inn where pottery buyers from all over the country used to stay



Tonbaibe Wall: in the past when a kiln was dismantled at the end of its working life, bricks from the kiln structure were reused to build walls – an intelligent use of materials unique to pottery areas



The Pottery Shrine, Tōso Jinja, dedicated to Imamura Sannojo's son Yajibē (Joen), said to have begun porcelain production



Tenmangū Shrine, dedicated to the guardian deity of Mikawachi



Mikawachi East Kiln Site: the largest multi-chambered climbing kiln stretching to 120m in length, used from the Edo to Shōwa periods (until the mid 20th century). The smoke outlets remain in one section

Mikawachi

At the time of the Japanese invasions of Korea at the end of the 16th century, one Korean potter, Kōrai Baba, married into the family of Nakazato Moemon from Karatsu in Saga prefecture, and founded a pottery-making workshop here at Nagahayama in Mikawachi in 1622. This marked the beginning of Mikawachi as a pottery-making region. The workshop went on to become the first *daimyō*-sponsored ceramics studio, where Imamura Yajibē (Joen) produced the first porcelain. It has remained at the heart of the Mikawachi pottery making region ever since.

Mikawachi-ware Museum / Mikawachi-ware Traditional Industry Hall

Outstanding Mikawachi works, old and new, are displayed under one roof

Here visitors can appreciate both Mikawachi's history and modern Mikawachi Ware, with an exhibition room showing pieces from every era from the 17th to the mid 20th centuries, alongside a space devoted to the present-day pottery studios. As well as the jars, platters and vases one would expect, there are fragments from the era of pre-porcelaneous pottery, Edo period (1603-1868) tea ware and hand-crafted ornaments, and very unusual overglaze enamels not found elsewhere.

There is also an area for visitors to try painting on pottery, and openwork.

Address | 343 Mikawachi Honmachi, Sasebo City, Nagasaki prefecture. **Tel** | 0956-30-8080
Opening hours | 9:00 – 17:00
Closed | Dec 29th – Jan 3rd **Admission** | Free.



Items are displayed from the founding of Mikawachi Ware, through the era of the *daimyō*-sponsored workshop to the late 19th and early 20th centuries



In the modern exhibit room one can see items from each pottery studio

The large car park enables visitors to leave their cars here while they explore the town

Mikawachi-things to See and Learn

Sasebo Museum of the History of the Vessel

From the pre-Mikawachi Ware era to the acquisition of tools

The world's oldest earthenware known as 'bean-motif' earthenware, estimated to be 12,000 – 13,000 years old, was excavated here in the Sasebo City area. This museum shows the progression from early earthenware to the era of glazed pottery, to the age of porcelain vessels. Valuable pottery fragments give visitors a picture of Mikawachi ware history before porcelain production began.

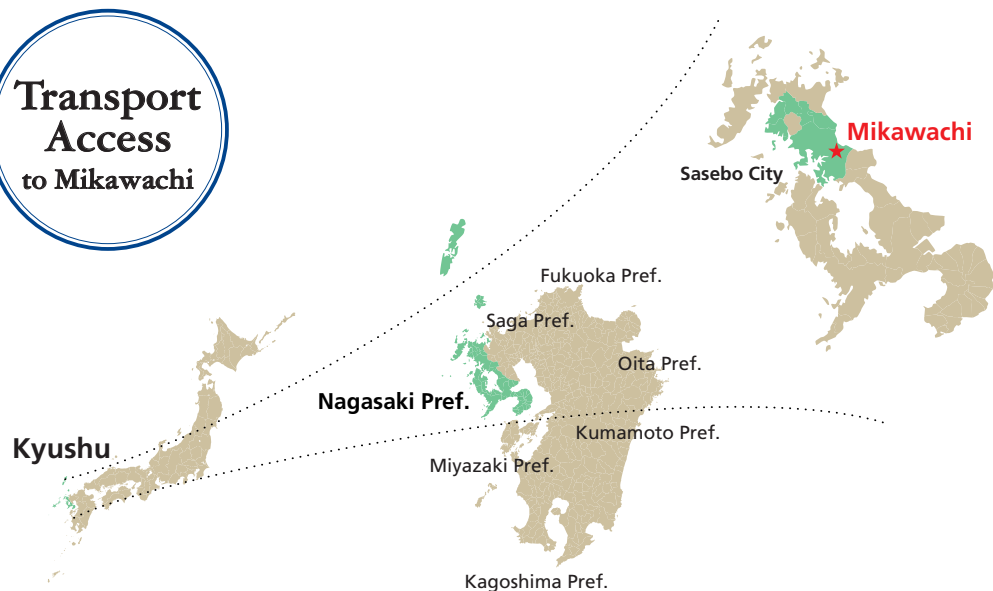
The exhibition also explains this region's unique production processes using tools from previous eras, a model climbing kiln, and visual images.



A very easy-to-follow display, with a chronology of Mikawachi Ware

Address | 289-1 Mikawachi Honmachi, Sasebo City, Nagasaki prefecture.
Tel | 0956-30-6565 **Opening hours** | 9:00 – 17:00
Closed | New Year's Holiday **Admission** | Free.

Transport Access to Mikawachi



by AIR

The flight time to Nagasaki: from Tokyo is about 1 hour 35 minutes, from Nagoya, about 1 hour 15 minutes, and from Osaka, about 1 hour 5 minutes.

Arriving from Nagasaki Airport: The drive from Omura Interchange to Sasebo-Mikawachi interchange (via the Nagasaki Expressway and then the Nishi-Kyushu Expressway) takes about 40 minutes.



by RAIL

Arriving from Fukuoka: From Hakata Station, the train journey to Mikawachi Station takes about 1 hour 50 minutes. (Take the Limited Express Midori service as far as Arita Station, then change to the local service on the JR Sasebo Line.)

Arriving from Sasebo city centre: From Sasebo Station, the train journey to Mikawachi Station (using the local service on the JR Sasebo line) takes about 22 minutes.



by CAR

Arriving from Fukuoka: The drive from Dazaifu Interchange to Sasebo-Mikawachi Interchange (via the Nagasaki Expressway and then the Nishi-Kyushu Expressway) takes about 1 hour 15 minutes.

Arriving from Sasebo city centre: The drive from Sasebo Central Interchange to Sasebo-Mikawachi Interchange (via the Nishi-Kyushu Expressway) takes about 30 minutes.

Enquiries | Mikawachi Ceramics Industry Cooperative

Tel | 0956-30-8311 **URL** | <http://www.mikawachi-utsuwa.net/>

長崎県 Nagasaki prefecture

電源立地地域対策交付金事業



Website

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