A large red circle containing bold, black Japanese calligraphy, likely the characters for 'Wakasa' (若狭).

# Echizen Wakasa Traditional crafts



# More Than a Thousand Years of Manufacturing Tradition

Fukui is known nationwide as a prefecture built on manufacturing, running the gamut from Fukui's famous textiles and glasses to nationally designated traditional handicrafts. And of course, with its many mountains and plentiful coastlines, Fukui has flourished through agriculture, forestry, and fishing, each keeping true to the old-fashioned spirit while simultaneously making full use of the latest technologies, equipment, and information. Today, items made in Fukui are used all around the world.

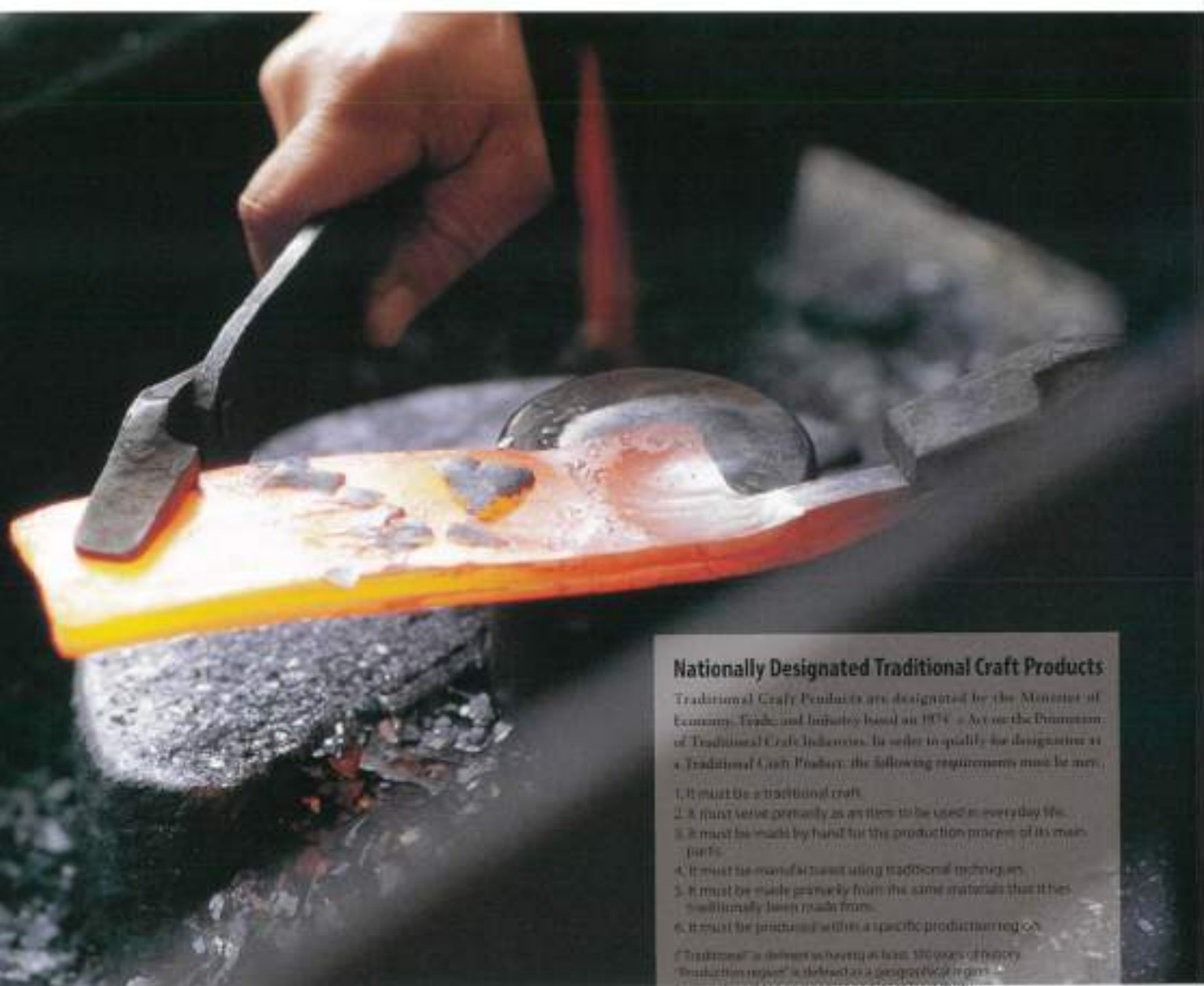


Textiles are among Fukui's best known products, with a history stretching back over a thousand years. Since Nara era (710-794), Fukui was already well established nationwide as a maker of habutae silk. More recently, Fukui flourished as a manufacturer of rayon, and even today, Fukui produces over 30% of Japan's synthetic fiber textiles, such as polyester and nylon. These textiles have been used for fashion garments made by famous designers and for sports team uniforms, as well as in the production of car seats, airbags, cellular phones, computers, and much more.



Fukui also boasts an over-95% share of Japan's eyeglass frames, making it a world-class producer of glasses. Fukui's glasses industry has its origins in the Meiji era (1868-1912), when technology was brought up from Osaka in the expectation that, in the near future, glasses would be indispensable within society, and production began as a side business for farmers during the winter months. The tenacity of the people of Fukui led to success, and Fukui grew to be a major manufacturer of glasses in the postwar era of the 20th century. The skills and techniques that Fukui developed to manufacture glasses have led to advances made by companies in the medical and wearables fields.





### Nationally Designated Traditional Craft Products

Traditional Craft Products are designated by the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry based on 1974 Law on the Promotion of Traditional Craft Industries. In order to qualify for designation as a Traditional Craft Product, the following requirements must be met:

1. It must be a traditional craft.
2. It must serve primarily as an item to be used in everyday life.
3. It must be made by hand for the production process of its main parts.
4. It must be manufactured using traditional techniques.
5. It must be made primarily from the same materials that it has traditionally been made from.
6. It must be produced within a specific production region.

\* "Traditional" is defined as having at least 100 years of history.  
 "Production region" is defined as a geographical region having at least ten companies and/or at least thirty individuals producing a given craft.

The logo for Nationally Designated Traditional Craft Products combines the first character of the Japanese word for "tradition" ("伝") with the red circle on white representing the heart of Japan.



# Traditional Handicrafts that Enrich Everyday Life

The handicrafts so carefully made by our ancestors have become a vital part of our everyday lives. Several of them have been nationally recognized as Traditional Craft Products for their roles in modern life. The skills of the craftspeople shine through in the exquisite details and ease of use, for items that lend ordinary life a sense of elegance and richness.

Whether lacquerware, forged blades, pottery, chests, or agate stonework, Fukui's long history of excellence is at the heart of the techniques used even today, for handicrafts that exude old-fashioned spirit and make everyday life a little more special. Visitors to Fukui can even try making these traditional handicrafts for their special items.

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越前和紙

# Echizen Washi

Feel the Incredible Warmth of Handmade Washi Paper,  
Beloved by Artists



## Point

Washi paper's distinctive feel and texture lend themselves to a variety of atmospheres, from vast to intimate, and by using washi paper with illumination, you can achieve a truly unique feel.



## info

Fukui Prefectural Washi Cooperative Association  
11-11 Otaki, Echizen City, Fukui  
Tel: (0778) 43-0875 Fax: (0778) 43-1142  
<http://washi.jp/> Designated Jun. 2, 1976

About 1,500 years ago, the goddess of paper, Kawakami Gozen, appeared here in Echizen. Echizen had few crop fields but plenty of pure valley water, so Kawakami Gozen taught the people of Echizen the techniques of paper-making; Echizen has flourished as a paper production center ever since. Until the Nara era (710–794), most of the paper was made for copying Buddhist sutras, but soon the court nobles and samurai class were using lots of paper. Echizen's techniques and production both expanded, as new types of high-quality paper like Echizen Hosho came into production, after which Echizen's paper production developed under the protection of the shogunate and feudal lords, and Echizen became a major paper producer on the national level. In 1868, Echizen Washi was used to print Japan's first paper money, and it came to be beloved within the art world. In 1968, the 8th generation Iwano Ichibe was declared a living national treasure (a nationally designated important intangible cultural property), and in 2000, his successor, the 9th generation Iwano Ichibe, was likewise declared a living national treasure. In recent years, the use of Echizen Washi for interior decoration has expanded beyond wallpaper and sliding door coverings, lending interiors its warmth and elegant feel. All of this has been made possible through the tireless efforts of papermaking artisans, honing their techniques with paper mulberry, oriental paperbush, gampi shrub, hemp, sunset hibiscus, and other plants' fibers.

## How to use

A wide variety of washi paper goods are available, from luncheon mats and wallets to interior decorations, as well as uruwashi, washi paper coated with lacquer.



## Experience facility

### Papyrus House Hands-on Experience Workshop at Echizen Washi Village



Use a paper-making frame to make your own shikishi square poetry card, postcards, or other washi paper item by hand. You can add pressed flowers or colored dyes as you go, for a finished result that is one of a kind. Staff members are on hand to provide help and advice, so even young children can make their own washi paper.

8-44 Shinzaike-cho, Echizen City, Fukui  
(0778) 42-1363

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Closed Dec. 28 to Jan. 4

Free admission

Take a bus from JR Takefu Sta. (25 min.), then get off at Kami no Bunka Hakubutsukan bus stop and walk 2 min.

<http://echizenwashi.jp/features/papyrus.html>

### Experience

Paper-making (shikishi square poetry card, coasters, luncheon mat, postcards, business cards, uchiwa hand fan, lampshade, etc.) ¥500 to ¥2,800

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Time req'd: 20–40 min.

Reservations req'd for groups





# Echizen Knife

The Techniques of Ancient Japan Give These Blades Edges Beloved by Pro Chefs



## P o i n t

Takefu Knife Village was established with the goal of creating forged blades, incorporating industrial design to make items that are ahead of their time. New bladed tools are also on display.



### info

Echizen Forged Blade Cooperative Association 49-1-3 Ikenokami-cho, Echizen City, Fukui  
 Tel: (0778) 24-1200 Fax: (0778) 22-1015 <http://echizenuchihamono.com>  
 Takefu Knife Village Cooperative Association 22-91 Yokawa-cho, Echizen City, Fukui  
 Tel: (0778) 27-7100 Fax: (0778) 27-7100 <http://www.takefu-knifevillage.jp> Designated Jan. 12, 1979

Echizen Knife boast seven centuries of history, dating back to when a swordsmith from Kyoto came to Echizen and began making swords, sickles, and other bladed tools. Ever since then, Echizen has been a major producer of bladed farming tools. The Hokuriku region's famous traveling-peddler style of sales was applied to bladed tools: as lacquer-tappers traveled nationwide to collect lacquer, they would sell the same types of bladed tools as the sickles they used, bringing home orders for sickles in each region's unique style. During the mid Edo era (1603–1868), the Echizen sickle boasted the top production quantities in Japan, placing it above even Echizen's other bladed tools. The traditional techniques used since ancient times to forge the steel and finish the blades have been handed down for generations; such as pounding the steel from the corner to give it a diamond shape, mainly used for making sickles, or hammering two layers of steel layered together to pound them both thin quickly. In recent years, Echizen forged knives with unique designs and knives designed for western chefs have garnered praise from around the world.

## How to use

The standard Japanese three-piece set: a nakiri knife for vegetables, a deba knife for cleaning fish, and a sashimi knife. Regular sharpening by a professional is essential to keeping knives in peak cutting condition.



## Experience facility

### Hamono no Sato (Echizen Knife Promotion Facility)

Learn about the history and techniques involved in Echizen Knives, and see knives from various artisans' workshops. At the Hamono no Sato workshop, visitors can see displays of knife-making equipment. If you visit at the right time, you can even watch a traditional craft artisan demonstrating smith-forging steel or knife-sharpening (irregular schedule).

48-6-1 Ikenokami-cho, Echizen City  
(0778) 22-1241 9:00 to 17:00  
Closed Tue. and Dec. 29 to Jan. 3  
Free admission  
15 min. by taxi from JR Takefu Station  
<https://www.hamomonosato.com/>



#### Experience

(Hands-On Experience Program)  
Cooking lessons and hand-sharpening lessons are available (irregular schedule; fee required).



### Takefu Knife Village

Make a letter opener starting with just a plate of copper, for a great hands-on experience for kids and adults alike. If you want the full Echizen Knife experience, you can even forge your own steel before making it into a knife (two-day workshop, 12 hours total).

22-91 Yokawa-cho, Echizen City, Fukui  
(0778) 27-7120 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Closed Jan. 1–3 Free admission Take a bus from JR Takefu Sta. (25 min.) , then get off at Ajimano Jinja-mae bus stop and walk 1 min.  
<http://www.takefu-knifevillage.jp/>



#### Experience

Make a key fob ¥600, make a letter opener ¥1,000, Make a hand-forged knife ¥30,000, and more 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. 40 min. to 2 days (reservation req'd)



### Echizen Forged Blade Cooperative Society

Offering a great selection of knives and bladed tools for everyone from amateur home cooks to professional chefs, as well as blade sharpening and repair services. Visitors can also learn about the history and production process of blades through educational panels and videos.

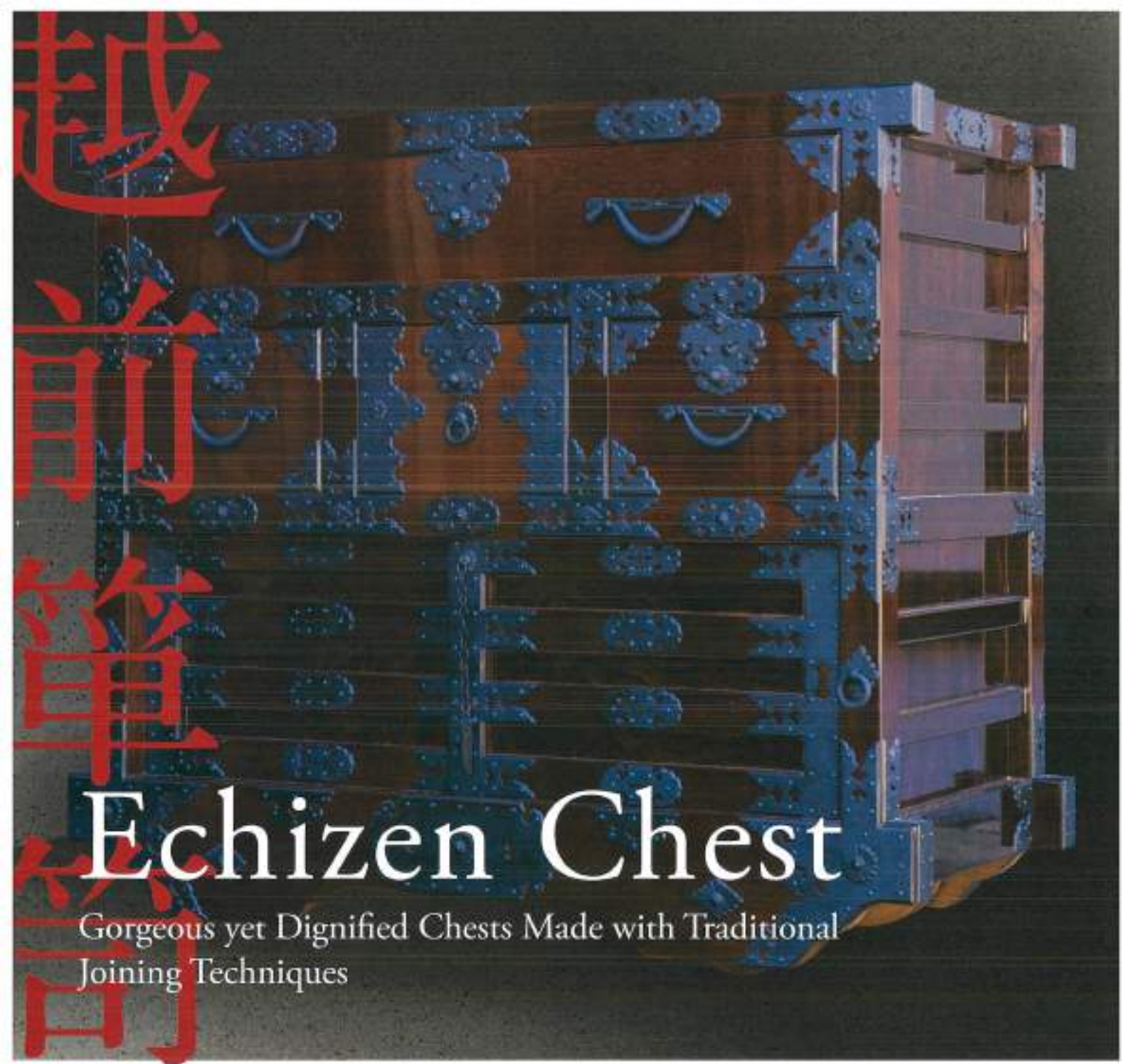
49-1-3 Ikenokami-cho, Echizen City, Fukui Tel: (0778) 24-1200  
8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (or 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sundays and national holidays)  
Closed Dec. 29 to Jan. 3 Free admission  
Take a taxi from JR Takefu Sta. (15 min.)  
<https://www.echizenuchihamono.com/>



#### Experience

Blade sharpening ¥800 and up (plus tax)  
Visitors can see how artisans sharpen knives, try hands-on experiences, and see the artisans' workshop for themselves (reservations required)





# Echizen Chest

Gorgeous yet Dignified Chests Made with Traditional Joining Techniques



## Point

A number of chests made from 1819 to the 1880s in Echizen City still remain today. During the Edo era (1603–1868), kake-suzuri writing boxes used to store abacuses, account books, and more were made with Echizen Chest techniques.



### info

Echizen Sashimono Cooperative Society

1-19 Hon-cho, Echizen City, Fukui

Tel: (0778) 22-3366 Fax: (0778) 22-3366

<http://mku.store-web.net/e-sasi/index.html>

Designated Dec. 26, 2013



Echizen Chests had their start in the second half of the Edo era (1603–1868). The cabinetmakers of Echizen-Fuchu began to take on side jobs alongside working on Noh masks, such as bathtubs and wooden doors, and eventually makers of truly excellent chests appeared among their ranks. As Japan entered the Meiji era (1868–1912), many chestmakers started businesses here, building a townscape known as "Chest Town." Chest Town was at its most vibrant after the fall harvest: the parents of daughters to be married would visit to inspect the chests, dressing tables, and other items available to be given as dowry gifts for the wedding. As demand increased, these chestmakers focused on their materials and their work, with the goal of passing along the techniques they had used up to that point without allowing quality to decline. As a result, Chest Town came to earn a reputation for the top level goods that cost 20% more, yet they remained as in demand as ever. One of the defining characteristics of Echizen Chests is that they are made of solid wood, held together entirely with wood joints rather than using nails, and their lacquer coating gives these chests a rich luster and a durable finish. The metal ornaments on the exterior give these chests a dignified feel, and the finest chests are all made from zelkova wood, finished with either shunkei or roiro lacquerware techniques. These chests were formerly made primarily to be given as wedding presents, while today many of them are used simply as furniture. Their distinctive feel and incredible quality, however, has remained unchanged since the days when the chest town earned the reputation.

## Topics

### A reproduction of an Echizen Chest from two centuries ago!

A reproduction of an Echizen Chest from two centuries ago! In August of 2015, two years after Echizen Chests were recognized as a Traditional Craft Product, Chairman Uesaka Tetsuo of the Echizen Joinery Association completed a reproduction of an Echizen Chest, using one from two centuries ago as a model.

Wheels are attached to the underside of this 103 cm wide, 53 cm deep, 92.3 cm tall, and 80 kg "wheel-chest," and it is decorated with 238 individual metal ornaments.

Additionally, the Echizen Joinery techniques indispensable for making Echizen Chests are said to date all the way back to the middle of the 8th century.



Chairman Uesaka Tetsuo of the Echizen Joinery Association building an Echizen Chest



No matter what angle you view it from, this chest is a work of art.

Clockwise from top right: The metal ornaments lend a dignified feel. Inside of the chest, you'll find more drawers. The back of the chest is fitted with ornaments as well.



# Hands-on Course Itinerary Examples

## 1 Lacquerware course

### A Echizen-Ono Shichiken Morning Market

This morning market has been a regular event in Echizen-Ono for over four centuries. People from the area sell their produce, prepared foods, and more. Held daily from 7:00 to 11:00 a.m., Mar. 20 through Dec. 31.



### B Ono Castle

Old Nobunaga's army commander, Kanamoto Nagachika, had this castle built; in more recent years, it has become well known as the "Castle in the Sky." This prefecturally-designated cultural property was rebuilt in 1968, and inside you'll find displays of items once owned by the feudal lords of this castle.



### C Ichijodani Asakura Remains

The remains of a castle town from the Warring States era. The excavated townscape includes the remains of samurai residences, temples, townhouses, roads, and more. Nationally designated as a Special Historic Site, as a Site of Special Scenic Beauty, and as an Important Cultural Property.



### Experience facility

## D Echizen Lacquerware Hands-on Experience



Paint a picture on a bowl or hand mirror, or carve a design for chinkin gold inlay, coat the area with lacquer, and apply gold powder to make a chinkin design. (See page 05)

### E Megane Museum (Eyeglass Museum)

Fukui is a major producer of eyeglasses. In addition to seeing the many types of glasses made in the area for sale, at the Megane Museum you can use a saw, file, and other tools to make your very own pair of glasses. (See page 22)



## 2 Bladed Tools and Washi Paper course

### A Soja Daijingu Shrine

This shrine, nicknamed "Osonja-san," was built long ago in the then-capital of the feudal domain. The giant torii gate and its vast grounds make it feel like the favored shrine of the capital.



### Experience facility

## B Hands-on Forged Blade Experience

Use the techniques of Echizen Forged Blades and make your own kitchen knife, letter opener, customized knife, key fob, or more. (See page 09)



### C Vine Bridge

At 44 m long, 1.8 m wide, and 12 m high, this bridge made of vines is an incredibly unique sight within Japan, and the way it sways makes crossing it exciting! They say that if you pledge your love on this bridge, you'll live happily forever after.



### D Okamoto Shrine & Otaki Shrine

Dedicated to Kawakami Gozen, the goddess of paper who looks after the washi paper village. This nationally designated Important Cultural Property was built in 1843.



### Experience facility

## E Hands-on Paper-making Experience

Make paper by hand, using old-fashioned tools. Add pressed flowers or dyes as you go, for a one-of-a-kind design. (See page 07)

