

Japanese Crafts and Gastronomy in Gifu: Why Higashi Mino is a Hidden Gem for Art and Culinary Lovers



HO-CA (Home of Clay Arts). © Ben Weller

Tucked away in Gifu Prefecture, Higashi Mino is a hidden gem waiting to be discovered. With the highly anticipated Chuo Shinkansen set to make the region more accessible, Higashi Mino is poised to become a sought-after destination. But with rising concerns about overtourism, now is the perfect time to explore this culturally rich area before the crowds arrive.

As Osaka Expo 2025 approaches, Higashi Mino is gearing up to shine on the global stage. Beyond its scenic hiking trails, it offers an authentic cultural journey through traditional craft arts and exquisite culinary experiences. From mastering the delicate art of Mino ware pottery to savoring local dishes served on handcrafted ceramics, this region beautifully blends tradition with modern creativity. Whether you're an art enthusiast, a foodie, or simply looking for a new adventure, Higashi Mino invites you to slow down, savor, and support the preservation of Japan's cultural heritage. Don't wait until it becomes the next tourist hotspot—experience Higashi Mino now, while it remains an untouched treasure. Whether you are hiking the trails, looking for a slow-paced travel destination, or want to immerse yourself in Japan for a longer stay, below is a handpicked list of places to add to your list.

Tajimi City: The Historical Heart of Mino Ware

Tajimi City offers a deep dive into the history and tradition of Mino ware pottery, making it an essential stop for cultural enthusiasts. Mino ware, known as *Minoyaki*, has long been celebrated as one of Japan's finest pottery styles. It began as simple, utilitarian ceramics, but over the centuries, it evolved into stunning artistic masterpieces that are cherished around the world today.

To truly appreciate the rich history of Mino ware, a visit to the [Mino Ceramic Art Museum](#) is a must. Here, you can explore the evolution of pottery styles and discover how techniques have been preserved and passed down through generations. The museum beautifully showcases how this humble craft transformed into a highly respected art form, highlighting the cultural significance and timeless beauty of Minoyaki.

For those seeking a hands-on experience, [Home of Clay Art \(Ho-CA\)](#) offers an immersive pottery-making retreat. Launched in 2012 with support from the Tajimi City Government, Ho-CA invites visitors to leave behind the hustle and bustle of daily life and dive into the art of ceramics in the heart of “ceramic town” Tajimi. What makes Ho-CA truly unique is its residency program, designed especially for international guests with a passion for Japanese-style ceramics. These one-month stays provide a rare opportunity to learn from local masters, catering to all skill levels from beginners to advanced artists. At Ho-CA, you don't just learn pottery—you live it, experiencing the deep-rooted traditions of Japanese ceramics in an authentic and inspiring setting. Around 200 guests have joined their residency, many of whom love their experience so much that they return again.

Toki City: Modern Craftsmanship at KOYO Base

Toki City showcases how traditional Mino ware techniques are beautifully fused with modern design and functionality. For a glimpse into the modern side of Mino ware, head to [KOYO Base](#). This innovative facility perfectly balances traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design,

making it a hub for art enthusiasts. A tour of the **Koyo Pottery Factory** reveals how ancient pottery techniques are infused with modern aesthetics, creating pieces that are both functional and beautifully crafted.

What sets KOYO Base apart is its unique “CLAY to Table” concept. Here, visitors can experience pottery in an entirely new way—by eating, shopping, learning, and enjoying the art of ceramics. From savoring delicious local dishes served on handcrafted ceramics to trying your hand at pottery making, KOYO Base invites you to rediscover the beauty of Minoyaki in an interactive and unforgettable way.

Mizunami City: Living the Mino Momoyama Ceramic Lifestyle

In Mizunami City, pottery is not just an art—it's a way of life. At [Hanzawagama](#), ceramic masters **Hirohisa Kondo** and **Seiko Kondo** keep the traditional Mino Momoyama ceramic lifestyle alive. Known for their dedication to ancient techniques, the Kondos create pieces that reflect the philosophy and artistry of traditional Japan. Visiting their workshop feels like stepping back in time, where every piece of pottery tells a story rooted in history and tradition.

Japanese cuisine **Kingyo** elevates dining to an art form by serving seasonal Japanese cuisine, some even plated on exquisite Mino ware. Their menu focuses on local ingredients, highlighting the region's flavors while paying homage to traditional cooking methods. Kingyo also hosts sake and food pairing workshops, offering a unique cultural experience for visitors. In the summer, they introduce creative pairings such as sake with ayu sweet fish or a unique method of warming sake and cooling it instantly with ice cubes. These workshops not only showcase the versatility of sake but also contribute to revitalizing the Higashi Mino sake scene.

For an exclusive and intimate stay in Mizunami City, [KAWAZU](#) offers a one-of-a-kind experience as a private auberge inn that welcomes only one guest per day. Housed in a historic building dating back to 1861, with a garden established in 1926, KAWAZU allows guests to immerse themselves in the tranquility of a beautifully preserved setting. The architectural elegance and serene garden evoke a nostalgic atmosphere, offering a glimpse into Japan's timeless heritage and artistry.

Nakatsugawa City: A Taste of History at Yakeyama

In Nakatsugawa City, culinary experiences are intertwined with history, providing a flavorful journey into the past. [Yakeyama](#) is a historical restaurant linked to a samurai and statesman named Kogoro Katsura. It served as a hideout to the samurai during Japan's Meiji Restoration. With its preserved architectural styles, Yakeyama transports visitors back in time, allowing them to feel as if they are living in a bygone era of Japan. The authentic surroundings vividly capture the charm of ancient days, evoking a sense of nostalgia and helping you imagine what life must

have been like in a distant past. Dining at Yakeyama is a cultural experience, with dishes served beautifully, featuring local and domestic craftware. Their menu celebrates local flavors, featuring wild mushrooms, mountain vegetables, wild game such as venison and boar hot pot, and the region's renowned Hida beef. Each meal reflects the season, preserving the tradition of Japanese culinary art while enhancing the dining experience with artisanal pottery.

For those with a sweet tooth, [Minoya](#) is a must-visit shop to taste traditional Japanese sweets. Their specialties include chestnut-based delicacies and sweet mochi *karasumi*, a confection inspired by the shape of Chinese ink stick – the shape is reminiscent of the region's surrounding mountains. This unique twist showcases the intricate art of wagashi-making that has been passed down through generations. At Minoya, visitors can witness firsthand the dedication and skill required to create these delicate confections.

As you explore Higashi Mino, you're not just sightseeing—you're contributing to the preservation of Japan's cultural heritage in areas that are often overlooked by the booming tourism of Japan.

Preserving Culture Through Meaningful and Sustainable Travel

Higashi Mino offers an extraordinary blend of art, history, and gastronomy, preserving traditions that are increasingly rare in modern Japan. By exploring its craft arts and culinary scenes, visitors contribute to the survival of these cultural practices, supporting local artisans and helping to safeguard dying arts. This approach to tourism promotes cultural appreciation and sustainability, offering a meaningful alternative to overcrowded tourist spots.

Visiting Higashi Mino allows travelers to engage deeply with Japan's cultural heritage, ensuring these traditions are cherished and continued for generations to come. Plan your cultural getaway and experience firsthand the timeless beauty and flavor of Higashi Mino, a place where tradition and modernity coexist in perfect harmony.

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By Nina Cataldo, Journalist

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HO-CA (Home of Clay Arts). © Ben Weller



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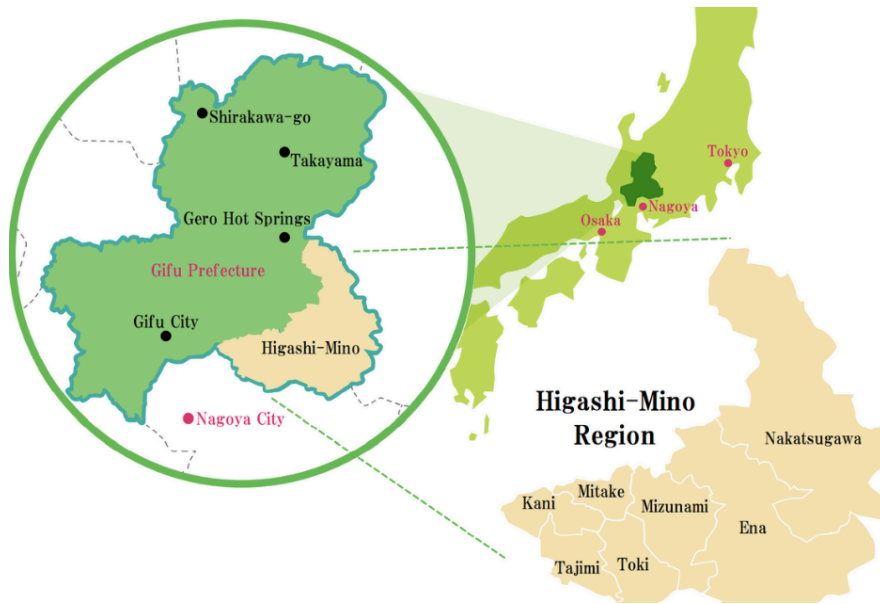
Traditional dishes using local ingredients at Koyo Base. © Ben Weller



HO-CA is a residence-style pottery-making facility. © Ben Weller



Minoya. © Ben Weller



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