

# Oita—Home of Bamboo Production Where You Can Enjoy Bamboo Art



Photo: Hiroyuki Hirai

Renowned architect Ban Shigeru designed the Oita Prefectural Art Museum. The building's beautiful latticed appearance was created using the bamboo art *henso*, a technique for weaving bamboo strips into a precise pattern.

**Oita Prefecture is located on the east coast of the Kyushu region in the southwestern part of the Japanese archipelago. The area is a producer of fine quality bamboo, and bamboo crafts and art have developed here since modern times. Tourism tailored for visitors who wish to enjoy its bamboo culture and other regional cultural forms is growing. We heard more from an official of Oita Prefecture.** (Text: Kurosawa Akane)

**O**ita City is a key area in Eastern Kyushu. It is located in central Oita Prefecture, overlooking Beppu Bay, and blessed with a mild climate and natural surroundings. There you will find the Oita Prefectural Art Museum, which has a special presence.

“Oita Prefecture produces the largest amount of *madake* (giant timber bamboo) in Japan. This fine-quality bamboo is widely loved and used in a wide range of products, from daily necessities to souvenirs, as well as for works of art such as Beppu bamboo crafts, which are nationally designated Traditional Arts and Crafts. This natural feature has helped produce many bamboo craftsmen who work both in Japan and abroad. You can enjoy world-class Japanese bamboo art at the Oita Prefectural Art Museum, which boasts one of Japan’s largest collections of bamboo crafts, at over 300 pieces, including works by Shounsai Shono (1904-1974), who has been named so-called a Living National Treasure.”<sup>1</sup>

So explains Kuramoto Kohei, who works in the Arts, Culture, and Sports Promotion Section, Planning and Promotion Department, Oita Prefecture.

Bamboo crafts are a symbol of Japan, in that they have developed with deep connections to Japanese cultural forms, such as the tea ceremony and flower arranging. In recent years, they have also been highly regarded by art lovers around the world as a form of contemporary art.

“Visitors can not only appreciate these crafts as works of art, but also visit the production workplaces or even have a conversation with a bamboo craftsman. Oita Prefecture also



Photo: Oita Prefectural Art Museum

*Honoo* (“Flame”), a work by Shounsai Shono, who is Japan’s first-ever Living National Treasure in the field of bamboo art (48.0 × 33.0cm, 1957) Collection of Oita Prefectural Art Museum.





Photo: Oita Prefecture

Above left: Oita Prefecture produces some of Japan's finest *madake*.

Below left: The greatest feature of Beppu bamboo crafts is *henso*, a technique for weaving flexible bamboo strips into a precise pattern. The entire process is done by hand. Pictured here is a *goshō-kago* (tea basket) for carrying tea utensils.

Right: The steam rising from the hot spring baths of Beppu creates a rich hot spring atmosphere. Since the modern era, bamboo crafts have flourished for practical products as well as souvenirs for hot spring visitors.<sup>3</sup>



Photo: Oita Prefecture

Left: At the Usuki Takeyoi Festival each year, about 20,000 bamboo *bonbori* lights gently illuminate the castle town with a soft glow.

Right: The venue for Oita Bamboo Art & Lights 2023 Take-e, an interactive art event held in 2023.



Photo: Beppu City Traditional Bamboo Crafts Center



Photo: Oita Prefectural Art Museum



Above: Bamboo craftsman Nakatomi Hajime is based in Takeda City, Oita Prefecture, and is active on the global stage. He is the graduate of the Oita Prefectural Bamboo Craft Training Center, the only one facility in Japan that trains bamboo craft artists.

Below: Overseas visitors watch *seichiku*, the process of removing oil from bamboo in a climbing kiln filled with boiling water and processing it for bamboo crafts.



Photo: Oita Prefecture

Above: You can get a hands-on feel for bamboo at a bamboo art workshop.

Below: The museum shop at the Oita Prefectural Museum of Art offers original goods created by bamboo craft artists in the prefecture, and they are popular as souvenirs.

has hot spring areas like Beppu and Yufuin, which have been well-known for many years. In those places, visitors can find *ryokan* (Japanese-style inns) that offer first-class Japanese hospitality. So, another appeal of Oita is the large number of lodging destinations where overseas visitors with a keen interest in Japanese culture can really enjoy themselves," adds Kuramoto.

"This year, Oita Prefectural Art Museum launched a new event called Oita Bamboo Art & Lights 2023. It's a hands-on art event where you can interact with bamboo. The event seeks not only to pursue artistic qualities, but also to stimulate interest in the natural features that gave rise to our thriving bamboo art included an exhibition of large objects, workshops, and lighting of bamboo crafts a local cultural resource. During this period, we also encourage people to visit bamboo and illumination events in various places, including the Usuki Takeyoi Festival in Usuki City, which is next to Oita City, as well as Chikuraku in Takeda City, which is about a one-hour drive from Oita City.

"At the same time, modern artists reside on the Kunisaki Peninsula, where not only bamboo and crafts, but also many works of Buddhist art, including National Treasures, have been preserved in many

locations. There, we are implementing projects to create artworks and otherwise breathe new life into the art world by carrying out events that support collaborations involving local historical and cultural heritage and modern art. We are also teaming up with industry and academia to provide information on sightseeing and cultural tourism that brings people into contact with Oita Prefecture's unique culture and art."

When you come to Oita Prefecture, first visit the Prefectural Art Museum to experience its many works of art. Next, perhaps enjoy a visit to the birthplace or workshop of an artist whose creations impressed or interested you, and broaden your knowledge by seeing and experiencing the unique natural features and culture of the area. We recommend visiting at a time when various events are being held.<sup>4</sup> 7

1. A perennial evergreen bamboo that grows throughout Japan except Hokkaido. Among all species of bamboo, it has the most resilient and workable culm, and has been cultivated and put to practical use throughout Japan since ancient times.
2. A person who has mastered to the highest degree an intangible skill that has been designated as an Important Intangible Cultural Property. These people are commonly referred to as Living National Treasures.
3. A long-term stay in a hot spring resort to improve symptoms or recover from illness or injury by enjoying the benefits of the hot spring.
4. Oita Prefectural Art Museum <https://www.opam.jp/en/> Japanese, English, Korean, and Chinese are available. Volunteer English language guides were introduced at temporary exhibits for the first time in FY2023. Special viewings of the collection with a curator are planned in Japanese and English.