

One Traditional Wicker Trunk Craftsman

Toyooka's 1,200 Years of Traditional Bag Crafting

When people think of Kinosaki, they think of *onsen* (hot springs), due to the town being known for its seven public bathhouses located throughout the area. But for Toyooka, the downtown district, what instead comes to mind are luxury handbags. Toyooka is quintessential to Japan as the backbone of the handbag industry. Today there are many handbag artisans in Toyooka, but only one remains who still weaves wicker bags by hand in the traditional way. He is not merely the only craftsman left in Toyooka, but in all of Japan.

These bags were presented at many international expos, winning awards at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904.



This man, named Takumi Terauchi, has been making traditional wicker trunks (*yanagi-gori*) for over 50 years. Living in Izushi - 25 minutes by bus from the downtown area of Toyooka - Terauchi is the only craftsman in Japan who has received national certification as a traditional *yanagi-gori* artisan. The incredibly meticulous and arduous work that he does cannot be replicated by machine, so he continues to look for apprentices in hopes of preserving this delicate, traditional art form. In his shop Takumikogei, one can often find him squatting over a wooden plank holding down the willow he is weaving for his next creation.



Traditional wicker bag-making techniques eventually evolved into modern methods. Through utilizing the *yanagi-gori* sales network and first-rate sewing techniques while the handbag industry developed, Toyooka became Japan's leading area for bag manufacturing. The brand Toyooka Kaban® (Toyooka Bag) was registered as a regional collective trademark in 2006 by combining the region and product names. Among the myriad of handbags produced in Toyooka, only outstanding products which meet quality standards set by the Hyogo Prefecture Bag Industry Association are certified as official Toyooka Kaban® merchandise. The Toyooka Kaban® brand logo is an assured seal of quality.

For inquiries regarding this press release

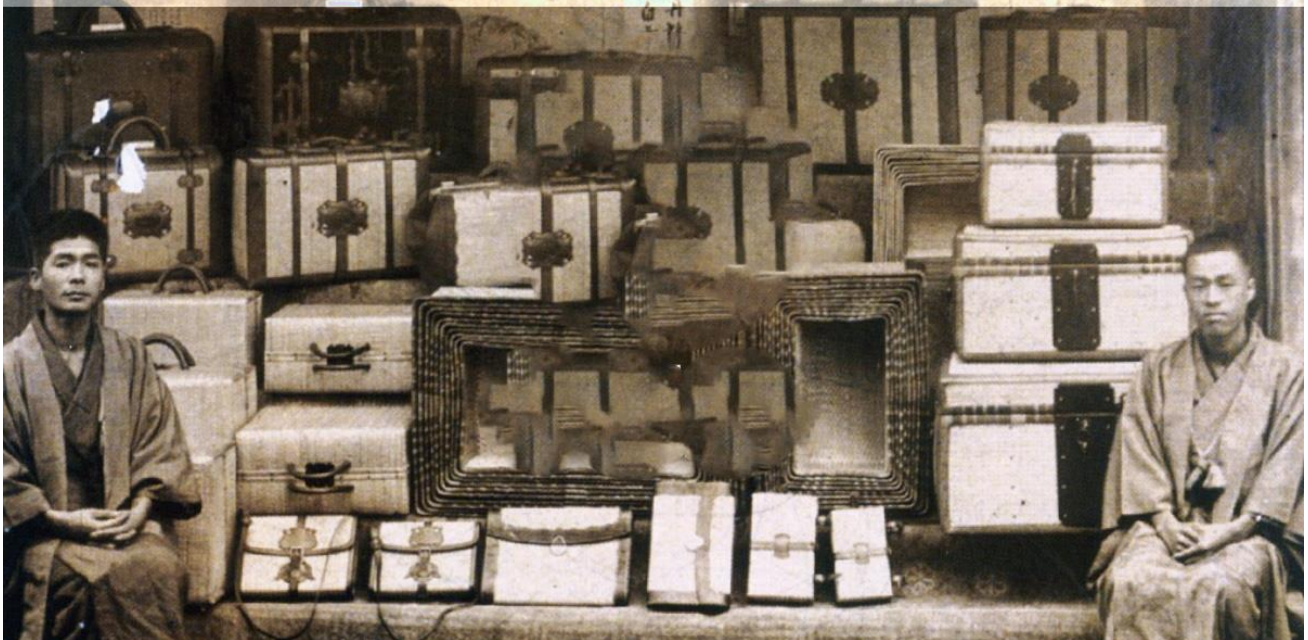
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Due to the gentle slope of the Maruyama River flowing into the Toyooka Basin, wetlands have formed at many points and created the most suitable environment for *Salix koriyanagi*, an East Asian species of willow used primarily in basket-weaving, to flourish. These baskets are the *yanagi-gori*, which have a superior air permeability and are perfect for Japan's high humidity. They are both durable and light, thus found long appreciated as storage containers for clothing, or as transportation equipment.

Given the heavy snowfall, limited land to develop new rice paddies, and other natural constraints in the area, there was a surplus labor force during barren periods. This created the ideal conditions for locals to pursue crafting as a side vocation. Willow crafting greatly flourished during the Edo period due to this and as a favorable result of the push to preserve feudal values, and Toyooka's *yanagi-gori* became renowned nationwide.

A new line of wicker products were exhibited and received a silver prize at the 1900 Paris Exposition.



Afterwards, the Meiji period introduced an updated variant with three leather bands. Toyooka fiber bags were adopted by Japanese teams at the Berlin Olympics in 1936, and fiber bags became a mainstream handbag product. In 1953, 80% of Japanese vinyl bags were produced in Toyooka, and thus became a prominent handbag crafting town. During the economic boom of 1958-1961, over 300 bag-producing firms emerged in Toyooka. In 2014, the Toyooka Kaban Artisan School was created by local artisans to ensure that these traditions would be passed on to the next generation. As a result, artisan skills originating from Toyooka are still reaching people worldwide today.

In Toyooka's downtown area, one can visit Kaban (Bag) Street for modern bags, as well as various handbag paraphernalia. The sidewalks are lined with bag-shaped benches and mailboxes, while the shops sell bags made of various materials and designs. One can even find vending machines selling small totes!

Those interested in learning about Toyooka City and its relationship not only with bags but with Oriental White Storks, tourism, and art can read more on [Toyooka City's new global site!](#)



Many handbag-shaped objects can be found on Kaban Street.



[Kinosaki Onsen](#) is a town of time-honored hot springs dating back 1300 years ago. It is home to seven public bathhouses, all located within walking distance of each other and the train station. Guests are encouraged to wear yukata and geta, stroll through the town, and go onsen-hopping.

[Toyooka](#) is a downtown area home to the Oriental White Stork, a bird that was revived from extinction in this very town. The city's efforts restored the Oriental White Stork population, and now about 140 fly the skies of Japan. Toyooka is also known for the Genbudo Caves.



[Izushi](#) is the resident castle town, popular for its nostalgic atmosphere of Edo-era Japan. It is home to many interesting attractions such as castle ruins, a samurai house, a kabuki theater, and a clock tower. The town's specialty is Izushi Sara Soba, buckwheat noodles served in small portions on small plates.

[Kannabe](#) is a mountainous area with fun activities year-round. In the winter, one can go skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, and sledding. In the warm months, one can go camping, paragliding, fishing, tree climbing, and more. Kannabe is the perfect destination for adventurers.



[Takeno](#) is a quaint fisherman town that is a hidden gem among the northern coast of Hyogo Prefecture. The beach has clear, blue waters while the mountains surrounding it offer great hiking opportunities. It is encouraged to stroll through the peaceful town, where one can find small shops and traditional landscapes.

[Tanto](#) is a quiet countryside town with magnificent nature—including a giant field of tulips in the spring and brilliant red-leaved trees in the fall.

