

## ■ Topics : Okayama Travelogue

### Bizen Osafune Japanese swords

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Okayama Prefecture, blessed with superior quality iron sand, trees for producing charcoal, and fresh water from the Yoshii river, has been famous for the production of Bizen Osafune Japanese swords since ancient times.

Notably, the production of a single Bizen Osafune sword demands the dedicated team work of a plethora of talented craftsmen including swordsmiths, lacquerware artisans, steel smiths, metal carvers, and logistics experts who transport the raw materials.



Swordsmiths making a Bizen Osafune sword

Historical records show that during Japan's Heian period (794-1185) the ready availability of high quality raw materials for making iron and charcoal 'fuel' to fire furnaces played an important role in the manufacture of 'Bizen Osafune' Japanese swords in Okayama.

Okayama is located in central Japan in the area known as Chugoku region. In ancient times, the soil was rich in iron-sand known as "Akome" in Japanese, making it well suited for producing swords. Furthermore, swordsmiths were able to use charcoal made from Akamatsu trees growing locally to generate the potent fire and heat for transforming the raw iron-sand into balls of steel or "Tamahagane".

The Bizen Osafune swords were produced for many centuries from the Heian to Edo Periods (1603-1868), thereby reflecting the high quality and popularity of the swords. Until around 1599 many swordsmiths practiced their craft near Osafune City and lived along the Yoshii river, which was the source of the precious water, another important element required to produce their high quality swords.

Okayama Prefecture has many museums and places where 21<sup>st</sup> century swordsmiths demonstrate how their predecessors produced the regions famous Bizen Osafune swords.

#### Further information

Bizen Osafune Sword Museum  
<http://okayama-japan.jp/en/art/art-bizen/>

#### Setouchi City

<http://www.city.setouchi.lg.jp/token/nihontonitsuite/index.html>