



SADO ISLAND
LOCAL GUIDE

AIKAWA

Discover a World Heritage Site.



Experience the Gold Mines of Sado Island.

Incredible Enough to Become a World Cultural Heritage Site!

During the Edo period (1603-1868), when the country was officially closed to the outside world, workers made clever use of traditional crafts to establish a large-scale mining operation here. For more than 250 years, the mines produced large quantities of high-quality gold.

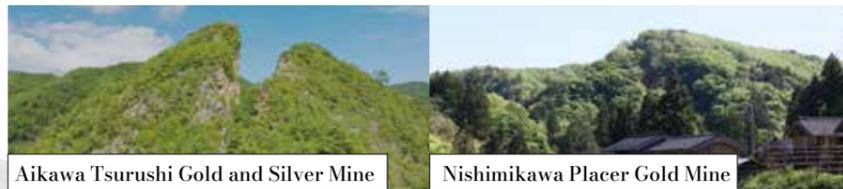
In recognition of the fact that there are few places in the world where remains of this type of mining and settlement still exist, it has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.



More details about World Cultural Heritage

The oldest mention in Japanese history of gold being mined on Sado Island comes from the Konjaku Monogatari (Anthology of Old and New Tales), written about a thousand years ago. Sado has been known as the "Island of Gold" since ancient times, but mining did not begin in earnest until the early 17th century. At that time, a shogunate magistrate's office was established on Sado, and the island prospered under the direct supervision of the magistrates, educational image scrolls were prepared for them, showing every step of the process, from extracting gold dust and mining gold ore to refining the ore and making koban coins. More than 100 surviving image scrolls from Japan and overseas, as well as the remains of mines and settlements, offer us a glimpse into the work people did here over many decades, as well as virtually all the changes made over the years to their mining technologies and production system. Finally, at a meeting in India in July 2024, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee inscribed the Sado Island Gold Mines on its World Heritage List, marking global recognition of the history and technology of some of Japan's largest gold mines, which have been in operation for centuries.

HIGHLIGHT 1 Mining Technologies to Suit the Character of the Mines



In Nishimikawa, miners used a method called onagashi (great flow), in which they dug by hand down to the layer of soil containing gold dust, then used water to wash away soil and dirt. They would then collect the gold dust left at the bottom of the water channel. At Aikawa Tsurushi, on the other hand, the miners would dig through hard rock and efficiently locate the veins of ore. The use of different mining methods suited to each mine was a factor in their success.

HIGHLIGHT 3 Large-Scale Production, under the Direct Supervision of the Tokugawa Shogunate



With its gold and silver mines, Sado was very important to the military government of the Tokugawa Shogunate. In 1603, the island was placed under the direct control of the shogunate, and a magistrate's office was established. Towns developed along the roads connecting the magistrate's office and the mines.

HIGHLIGHT 2 Division of Labor with Professionals Focused on Each Step



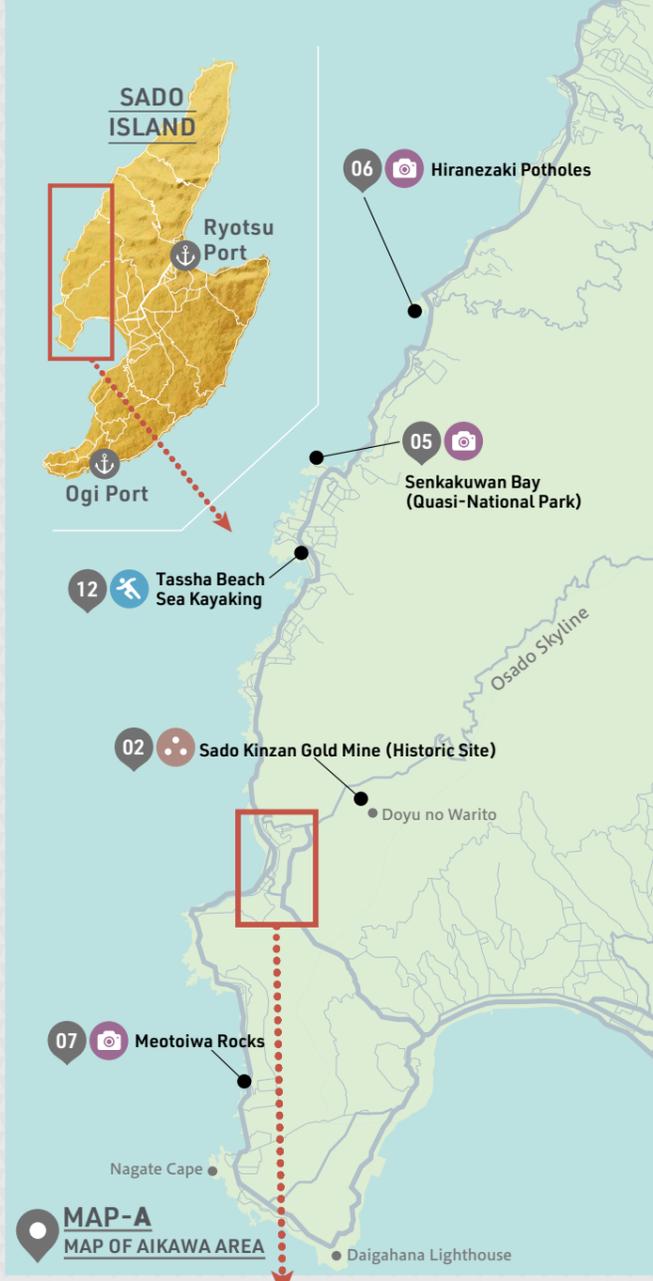
The Aikawa History Museum's collection includes a scroll depicting gold mining in Sado, showing the division of labor first introduced in the Edo period (1603-1868). Workers specialized in different tasks, such as purifying gold through a process called cementation. They would also mine, concentrate ore, smelt, refine, and produce koban coins. This division of labor allowed for the efficient production of high-quality gold.

HIGHLIGHT 4 A Unique Culture Created by People from Around Japan



The shogunate government's large-scale gold mining brought people from all over Japan to Sado. The first magistrate of Sado, Okubo Nagayasu, even invited Noh performers. Noh eventually became an important part of Sado's cultural landscape. There is also a ritual associated with the mines called Yawaragi: a prayer to appease the mountain deity and soften the hard ore from within. This ritual is still performed today as part of the Kozan Matsuri (Mine Festival) to honor the work of the miners and to pray for the prosperity of the mine.

Doyu no Warito is an iconic symbol of the Aikawa Gold and Silver Mine. It is the remains of an open pit mine from the Edo period (1603-1868) that looks like a mountain split in half. As miners dug their way through a huge vein of gold, the mountain gradually took on its present shape. The crack at the top is about 30 meters wide and about 74 meters deep.



Discover the True Treasure of Sado Island



MAP-B 01 **Kirarium Sado**
(Sado Gold and Silver Mine Guidance Facility)

How was gold mined 400 years ago? How did Sado become the top gold producer in Japan during the Edo period and in the East in modern times? Discover the answers to these questions and more through the exciting and informative exhibits at Kirarium Sado, making it the perfect place to start your exploration of the beautiful, friendly island of Sado.

- Hours: 8:30 to 17:00 (last admission to exhibition room at 16:30)
Closed Dec. 29 to Jan. 3
- Admission: Adults ¥300, children 6-14 ¥150
- 0259-74-2215



MAP-A 02 **Sado Kinzan Gold Mine (Historic Site)**

Step inside the caves that produced 78 tons of gold and 2,330 tons of silver in Sado from medieval to modern times, and observe the hard work and ingenuity of Edo-era miners brought to life through humanoid robots, information panels, and detailed dioramas. You can also get up close and personal with the iconic crevice known as Doyu no Warito.

- Hours: 8:00 to 17:30 (8:30 to 17:00 Nov. through Mar.)
Open 7 days a week
- Adults starting at ¥1,500, children starting at ¥750
- 0259-74-2389



MAP-B 03 **Site of Sado Magistrate Office**

After veins of gold and silver ore were discovered on Sado Island, the Sado Magistrate's Office was established here, bringing the island under the direct control of the Tokugawa Shogunate. In addition to serving as a government office and court, it was also used as a place to process gold and silver ores. The buildings here today are reconstructions based on historical records, and the exhibits on display include artifacts unearthed during archaeological excavations and valuable primary source documents.

- Hours: 8:30 to 17:00 (last admission at 16:30)
Closed Dec. 29 to Jan. 3
- Admission: Adults ¥500, children 6-14 ¥200
- 0259-74-2201



MAP-B 04 **Kitazawa Flotation Plant**

Gold, silver and other metals were once isolated from mined ore by crushing it into small pieces and then using a technique known as flotation. This facility is a prime example of a modern mining operation, once considered the finest in Asia, as the 50,000 tons of ore processed here each month can be quite daunting in its sheer size. It is also the site of nightly light shows.

- Hours: Open 24 hours a day
Open 7 days a week
- 0259-67-7602(Sado City Tourism Promotion Division)



MAP-A 05 **Senkakuwan Bay Quasi-National Park**

This stunning coastline has been compared to Norway's Hardangerfjord, considered by many to be one of the most spectacular sights in the world. The observation deck offers panoramic views of this dramatic landscape.



MAP-A 06 **Hiranezaki Potholes**

This strange formation was created by the harsh waves of the Sea of Japan over countless years. It is Japan's largest group of sea potholes formed by the gradual erosion of swirling seawater and has been designated a national natural monument.



MAP-A 07 **Meotoiwa Rocks**

An iconic symbol of the Nanaura coast, these rocks are literally called "husband and wife rocks". The area is beautiful during the day, especially with the surrounding reefs, and the beautiful sunsets here cast impressive shadows.

FOOD

Delicious Food in Aikawa

MAP-B 08  **Mochidaya**
FOOD



Enjoy dishes made with fresh seafood purchased by the restaurant's owner at morning auctions. Rice bowls topped with fresh local seafood are especially popular for lunch, and the menu offers a daily selection of about ten types of fish. In the evening, Mochidaya becomes an izakaya restaurant, serving seafood dishes and local sake.

🕒 Hours: 11:00 to 14:00 and 18:00 to 21:00 (last order at 20:30; Sun. open for lunch only)
Closed Mon.
📞 0259-67-7268



MAP-B 09  **Bunzo Okesa Bar**
FOOD



A bar serving local sake from Sado, as well as highballs and various other drinks, along with snacks. Tonight, being Wednesday night, lovers of traditional Sado Okesa folk music will gather here to dance in a circle to the sound of fue flutes and shamisens. Of course, anyone who wants to is welcome to join in for a fun and memorable way to spend an evening in town!

🕒 Hours: 18:00 to 1:00 the following morning
Closed Thu.
📞 0259-74-2252



MAP-B 10  **Kitazawa Terrace**
FOOD

Relax in a cafe-restaurant overlooking the historic remains of the Kitazawa Flotation Plant. Dishes made with local Sado Kurobuta pork are especially recommended, and there are a variety of dessert options, including soft-serve ice cream and crème brûlée made with milk from Sado Nyugyo, a local dairy.

🕒 Hours: 11:00 to 16:00 (last order at 15:30)
Closed Wed.
📞 0259-58-7085



MAP-B 11  **Café de Cattleya**
FOOD

This coffee shop has been a local institution in Aikawa for over 60 years. Take a seat and choose from a menu of classic Japanese coffee shop favorites such as hand-drip coffee, spaghetti napolitan, and cake sets. See why Café de Cattleya has been so popular for so many years.

🕒 Hours: 8:30 to 21:30 (Sun. 8:30 to 18:00)
Closed Jan. 1
📞 0259-74-3348



ACTIVITIES

Activities to Enjoy in Aikawa

🕒 Activity Time About 90 minutes

MAP-A 12  **Tassha Beach Sea Kayaking**
ACTIVITY

The sea off the coast of the Aikawa area is known for its clear water, and Tassha Beach is a great place to enjoy it. One of the best parts of sea kayaking is being able to see directly from the water's surface, perfect for moments like traveling through caves or discovering sea creatures hidden among the rocks. There are even opportunities for nighttime sea kayaking.

Meeting Place: Tassha Beach (meet at rear parking area of Tassha Revitalization Center, 463-8 Tassha, Sado)

💰 Price: Starting at ¥8,500 per person (reservations required; not available in winter)
📞 Contact: Show by Jaws 070-4428-0938



🕒 Activity Time 30 minutes or more

MAP-B 13  **Cycling**
ACTIVITY

The Aikawa area is a cyclist's paradise: a region where natural beauty and local culture coexist in harmony along a beautiful coastline, where the soothing sound of waves accompanies an exhilarating ride. There is something for everyone here, from the novice to the cycling enthusiast. The area is quite hilly, so sports bikes or e-bikes can be especially helpful for getting around.

Bicycle Rentals: Aikawa Tourist Information Center at Kirarium (Sado Gold and Silver Mine Guidance Facility)
💰 Fees: Starting at ¥1,000 for the first two hours for "city type" bikes, or starting at ¥2,000 for the first two hours for "sport type" bikes
📞 Contact: Aikawa Tourist Information Center 0259-74-2220



🕒 Activity Time About 120 minutes

MAP-B 14  **Rag-Weaving Workshop at Aikawa Traditional Skills Museum**
ACTIVITY

Saki-ori rag weaving is a traditional craft of the Aikawa area that has been passed down through generations for centuries. These textiles are woven from old pieces of cloth, resulting in a rustic yet distinctive look. The Aikawa Traditional Skills Museum offers a rare opportunity to learn this technique from local instructors through hands-on workshops.

Meeting Place: Aikawa Traditional Skills Museum (2 Aikawa Kitazawamachi, Sado)
💰 Price: ¥1,800 (reservations required)
📞 Contact: Aikawa Traditional Skills Museum 0259-74-4313



SHOPPING

SHOPPING

MAP-B 15  **Kitazawagama**
SHOPPING

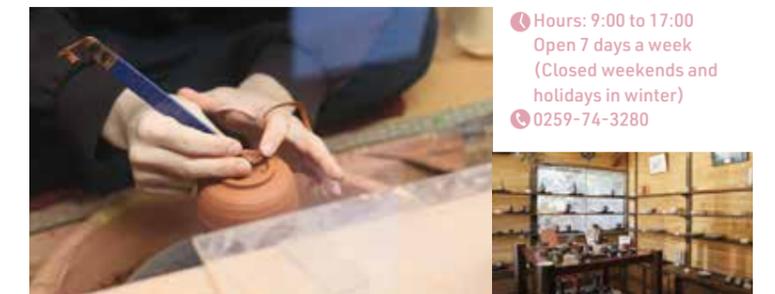
This is a Mumyoi ware workshop located at the Kitazawa Flotation Plant. Shop from a wide selection of bowls, cups, sake cups, and various other ceramics on display.

🕒 Hours: 9:00 to 17:00
Open 7 days a week
(Closed weekends and holidays in winter)
📞 0259-74-3280



Mumyoi Ware

This traditional style of Sado Island pottery is made from a local clay rich in iron oxide, known as mumyoi clay. A distinctive feature of this clay is its fine particle size: after firing, it becomes so hard that Mumyoi ware items actually ring like a metal bell when struck.



There are plenty of other restaurants to visit, too!

Check the Aikawa area of the "Eat" section of the Sado Tourism Navi website. 

EXAMPLE ITINERARIES

Here are some suggestions to get you started.



View on Google Maps



View on Google Maps

Biking



Kirarium Sado (Sado Gold and Silver Mine Guidance Facility)



P.3

5 min. (1.2 km)

Oma Port Remains



P.3

35 min. (7.2 km)

Senkakuwan Bay Quasi-National Park



P.4

40 min. (8 km)

Mochidaya



P.5

5 min. (1.3 km)

Kitazawa Flotation Plant



P.3

15 min. (2.2 km)

Sado Kinzan Gold Mine (Historic Site)



P.3

Walking



Kirarium Sado (Sado Gold and Silver Mine Guidance Facility)



P.3

5 min. (0.4 km)

Café de Cattleya



P.5

20 min. (1 km)

Former Aikawa Detention Center



P.3

10 min. (0.7 km)

Site of Sado Magistrate Office (Historic Site)



P.3

5 min. (0.5 km)

Kitazawa Terrace



P.5

1 min. (0.1 km)

Aikawa History Museum



P.3

ACCESS

How to get here, and how to get around.



Bicycle Rentals

Bicycle rentals make a great way to explore the Aikawa area at your own pace. Eco-Da-Chari e-bike rentals are available at the Aikawa Tourist Information Center at Kirarium Sado.



Bicycle Rentals Details

■ Sport Type & Sport Type Mini

¥2,000 for first 2 hours, then ¥500 per additional hour

¥4,500 for 24 hours

Additional ¥2,000 to return bikes at a different location (Tourist Centers only)

■ City Type

¥1,000 for first 2 hours, then ¥300 per additional hour

¥3,000 for 24 hours



Local Buses

While there are no trains on Sado Island, there are local buses operated by Niigata Kotsu Sado Co., Ltd. These eleven bus lines connect the island and are a viable option for travelers who want to take their time getting around. It's a good idea to check the bus schedules ahead of time, as you may need to change buses to reach your destination.

(Please note that on weekends and holidays, only the Honsen Line, Minami Line, Ogi Line, Kaifu Line, and Nanaura-Kaigan Line usually operate. All other bus lines require advance reservations by telephone by 5:00 p.m. the day before).



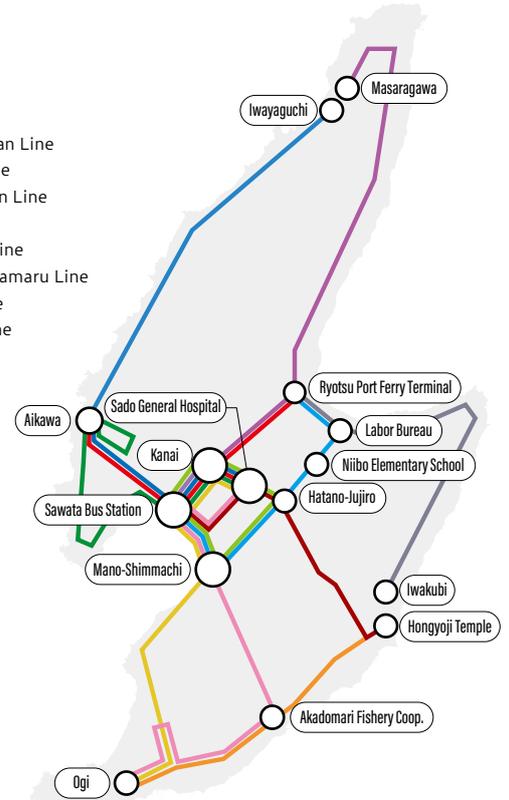
Niigata Kotsu Sado Local Bus Timetable

Contact: Niigata Kotsu Sado 0259-57-5114

■ Unlimited ride passes for 1, 2, or 3 days also available!

Bus Lines

- Honsen Line
- Kaifu Line
- Minami Line
- Nanaura-Kaigan Line
- Uchi-Kaifu Line
- Higashi-Kaigan Line
- Ogi Line
- Matsugasaki Line
- Kuninaka-Kanamaru Line
- Maehama Line
- Akadomari Line



Toward Ryotsu Aikawa — Honsen Line — Ryotsu Port Ferry Terminal

Toward Ogi Aikawa — Honsen Line — Sawata Bus Station (Transfer) — Ogi Line — OGI



Car rentals and taxis also available!

Scan for more detailed information on public transit on the island

