

Ako Unkayaki Pottery

Unkayaki, said to have been created in 1852 by Oshima Kokoku, is a mysterious style of pottery whose clay and firing methods were long unknown, rendering it a “phantom” craft. Ako Unkayaki is the revived version of this lost art. Its enchanting beauty, reminiscent of Ako’s sunsets, was highly praised and designated as a Traditional Craft of Hyogo Prefecture in 1993. Today, the tradition and artistry are carried on by potters such as Yoshiko Momoi and Kunihiko Nagamune.



| Features of Unkayaki

Unkayaki uses no glaze; instead, flames and smoke bring out natural hues of black, vermillion, and ivory. This process creates gradations that resemble the evening skies of Ako, and each piece has its own unique character.



| The “Phantom Unkayaki” That Slept for Over 100 Years

Unkayaki was completed by Oshima Kokoku in the late Edo period. However, the techniques were not passed down and the craft disappeared after just one generation. For over a century, only the name and remaining pieces survived—until it was brought back to life in modern times by Yoshiko Momoi and Kunihiko Nagamune.

These two potters spent over 20 years in trial and error, and the most challenging part was perfecting the firing process. The colors wouldn’t come out as desired, and the pieces often cracked in the kiln. Despite countless failures, they succeeded in recreating not only the dull luster and texture of the original works but also the distinctive and unmatched colors of Unkayaki.

| A New Evolution of Unkayaki

“I want to pass down Unkayaki, which once vanished from the world, to future generations.” With this dream in mind, potter Yoshiko Momoi opened the privately operated Unkayaki exhibition hall, the “Momoi Museum,” in 2011. Today, the museum serves as the main hub for sharing the charm of Unkayaki. In addition to exhibitions and sales, it also offers hands-on pottery experiences that even beginners can enjoy, making the world of Unkayaki more accessible to all.



Building on the tradition of the “phantom Unkayaki” left by Oshima Kokoku, the founder of Unkayaki, artisans are actively venturing into new fields, utilizing Unkayaki’s distinctive beauty, lightness, and pleasant texture to create everyday items such as tableware and accessories. More recently, they have begun producing ceramic panel art inspired by Unkayaki techniques, depicting scenes like glowing sunset skies. At the Momoi Museum cafe, guests can enjoy coffee or Matcha served in Unkayaki ceramics, offering a serene and restorative experience. The museum will continue to share the enduring charm of Ako’s traditional craft with all who visit.

1. “Teaburi” by Oshima Kokoku 2. “Mizusashi” by Yoshiko Momoi 3. “Chawan” by Kunihiko Nagamune
4. Matcha served in Ako Unkayaki ceramics at the Momoi Museum cafe 5. Ceramic panel art by Kunihiko Nagamune



Museum & Cafe of Unkayaki and Ako Dantsu

Momoi Museum

| Ako Traditional Crafts Studio Gallery

The Momoi Museum, located on a hill in Ako Misaki overlooking the Seto Inland Sea, exhibits and sells Ako Unkayaki and Ako Dantsu—both designated traditional crafts of Hyogo Prefecture. Inside, you’ll find an antenna shop, a cafe where you can relax with a view of the Seto Inland Sea, next to a garden featuring Suikinkutsu (water chime basins), which produce serene, bell-like sounds from dripping water. There is also an open terrace where pets are welcome.



The garden includes popular spots for couples visiting Ako Misaki, a “Lover’s Sanctuary,” such as the Angel’s Swing, the Matchmaking Pine Tree symbolizing a bond between lovers, and the Misaki Suspension Bridge leading to a scenic viewpoint.

| The Soothing Sounds of Suikinkutsu



The spacious garden features over ten Suikinkutsu (water chime basins), where water drops fall into buried jars, creating clear, mystical

tones like the sound of a Koto. Highlights include the Footbath Suikinkutsu and the Giant Millstone Suikinkutsu.



Unkayaki Antenna Shop

The shop offers a range of Unkayaki works by potters Yoshiko Momoi and Kunihiko Nagamune—from fine art pieces to everyday tableware. The popular “Unkayaki Gacha,” where everyone wins, is also available.

Unkayaki Pottery Experience

You can join a hands-on pottery experience where you make a Unkayaki leaf-shaped plate by hand. Create your own one-of-a-kind piece.

【Time】About 40 minutes

【Fee】¥3,850 per person (plus ¥600 shipping)

【Reservation】Call at least 3 days in advance



Ako Dantsu Antenna Shop

This shop showcases and sells works by various Ako Dantsu artists, not limited to a single studio. The collection includes one-mat-sized rugs, ranging from vintage designs to modern styles.

Ako Dantsu Exhibiting Artists

Kyoko Iseki (Dantsu Hut Misaki), Mie Kaji (Kaji Studio), Chieko Karita (Hana Studio / Association for the Preservation of Ako Dantsu), Yumiko Kobayashi, Setsuko Negoro & Mayu Hirotsu (Yayoi Studio Tsudoi), Fumiko Hirohata (Sumire Studio), Naoko Minami (Studio Yuu), Rie Miyamoto (Studio Kacho Fugetsu), Nobuko Yamasaki (Nobuko Studio), and Mariko Yamashita (Osaki Studio).

Tour ○ Experience Unkayaki Only (Reservation Required)

Momoi Museum

634 Misaki, Ako City ☎0791-56-9933 🚗 Available 🚻 Available

🕒 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM (Last Entry 4:00 PM, Closing at 4:40 PM)

📅 Closed on Tuesdays (If Tuesday is a public holiday, closed the following day)

¥ ¥500 per person (includes a voucher usable in the museum),

¥200 for elementary and middle school students and visitors with disabilities



Ako Dantsu Rugs

Ako Dantsu rugs, created in the early Meiji era by a woman named Naka Kojima, are recognized as one of Japan's "Three Dantsu Rugs," alongside Nabeshima Dantsu from Saga and Sakai Dantsu from Osaka. What makes Ako Dantsu unique is its use of three types of "tsumi" (trimming) techniques, all performed with a single pair of snips—resulting in designs with sharp outlines and a delightfully smooth texture.

History of Ako Dantsu



Ako Dantsu originated in the late Edo period when Naka Kojima, a resident of Ako city, Hyogo Prefecture, encountered a Chinese rug

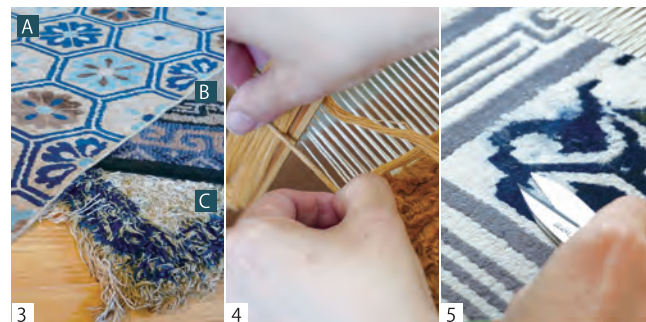
known as a Banreki-sen during her travels. Deeply inspired, she spent over 20 years researching and refining the craft, and in 1874, she successfully commercialized and introduced what would become Ako Dantsu to the world for the first time. During its peak from the late Meiji to early Showa periods, Ako Dantsu were produced by four to six weaving workshops within the city. However, in 1938, the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War led to a shortage of cotton yarn, forcing all workshops to shut down. Although Nishida Dantsu resumed operations after the war, it also ceased production in 1991, bringing Ako Dantsu to the brink of extinction.

- **Late Edo Period**
Naka Kojima began exploring methods to manufacture Ako Dantsu.
- **Early Meiji Period**
After more than 20 years of dedication, she successfully commercialized Ako Dantsu in 1874 (Meiji 7). From that point until 1938 (Showa 13), the number of workshops gradually increased, and Ako Dantsu reached its peak of prosperity.
- **Early Showa Period**
In 1938 (Showa 13), due to material shortages caused by the Second Sino-Japanese War, all workshops were forced to close under cotton yarn regulations.
- **Early Heisei Period**
In 1991 (Heisei 3), Nishida Dantsu, the last remaining workshop that had resumed production after World War II, finally ceased operations.

1. Antique Ako Dantsu owned by Yayoi Studio
2. Excerpt from a brochure published by Ako Dantsu Workshop, founded in May 1931 in Shinhamamura Kinokuni (Image courtesy of Ako City Historical Museum)
3. A: Ako Dantsu B: Sakai Dantsu C: Nabeshima Dantsu 4. Selvage Wrapping Process 5. Tsumi (Trimming) Process

In order to ensure the carefully preserved and passed-down techniques of Ako Dantsu from being lost, the Ako City Board of Education launched a "Dantsu Weaving Techniques Workshop" in 1991. In 1999, twenty-two graduates had formed the "Association for the Preservation of Ako Dantsu." Thanks to their efforts, the tradition was revived. Today, there are around 20 studios both in and outside Ako, and the tradition of Ako Dantsu continues to be passed down throughout Japan.

Features of Ako Dantsu



Ako Dantsu are known for their distinctive three-dimensional texture, created through a technique called "suji-tsumi," in which incisions are made along the edges of patterns using trimming snips. Combined with "ji-tsumi" for uniform thickness and "shiage-tsumi" for the final finish, these three tsumi techniques produce rugs with sharp designs and a durable, shape-retaining structure. Also, while the surface is astonishingly smooth, the underside has a dry, linen-like feel—offering a completely different tactile experience on each side.



In 1991, the Ako City Board of Education launched the "Ako Dantsu Weaving Technique Workshop," marking the beginning of a revival for the once-declining Ako Dantsu tradition. Thanks to this effort, its techniques continue to be passed down to this day.

A key organization actively engaged in training the next generation of Ako Dantsu artisans is the NPO "Association for the Preservation of Ako Dantsu," established by the first graduates of the "Ako Dantsu Weaving Technique Workshop." Through its dedicated facility, Ako Dantsu Rugs Craft Training Studio Tsumugu, the association continuously recruits trainees and has former graduates serve as instructors, carefully teaching the entire weaving process from loom preparation to final finishing.

● NPO "Association for the Preservation of Ako Dantsu" ~Studio Nami~

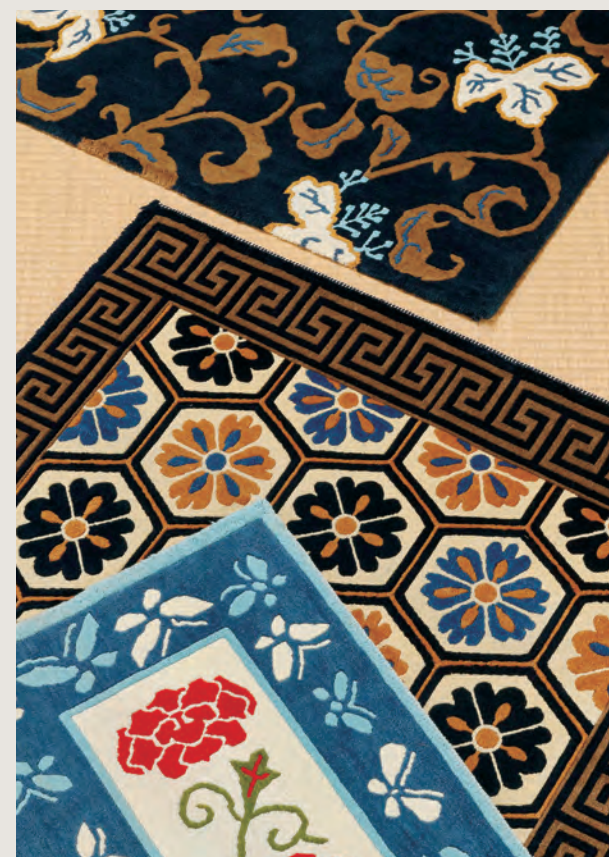


The NPO "Association for the Preservation of Ako Dantsu" plans to open a new facility, Dantsu Studio Nami, in 2025, dedicated to preserving and passing on traditional techniques. Visitors will be able to watch skilled weavers—graduates of Studio Tsumugu—and enjoy tea while admiring antique Ako Dantsu.

Tour ○ Sat, Sun & Mon
Reservation Required on the other day
Experience X
300 Osaki, Ako City
Available (2 spaces)
11:00 AM - 5:00 PM
0791-43-1820



Instagram



Tour ○ **Experience** ○ Reservation Required

A Ako Dantsu Rugs Craft Training Studio Tsumugu

Ako Dantsu Rugs Craft Training Studio Tsumugu is conveniently located within walking distance from JR Banshū-Ako Station, making it easily accessible for tourists. With six looms—the largest number in the city—the studio always has instructors and trainees present. Visitors can observe live demonstrations of weaving and tsumi (trimming), and watch the training process up close. The studio also offers hands-on weaving experiences using small tabletop looms (reservation required). Children from elementary school age and up can take part and weave their own 10 cm square piece over the course of a day.



2073-4 Kariya, Ako City Available WC Available 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM 休 Tuesdays and New Year holidays
0791-45-0606 Note: Workshop experiences are open to participants from elementary school age and up.

HP



Successor Training

Tour ○ Experience ○ Reservation Required

B Yayoi Studio Tsudoi

Not to mention creating original works, Yayoi Studio Tsudoi serves as a bridge to pass Ako Dantsu on to future generations. The studio has produced two graduates, including one who founded Studio Sangetsu in Kyushu, and currently trains one apprentice. The first floor houses the studio, while the second floor features a gallery showcasing the Three Dantsu Rugs of Japan and antique Ako Dantsu pieces. Visitors can view and touch antique Ako Dantsu to gain a deeper appreciation of this traditional art. The studio also offers a hands-on weaving experience (reservation required), where you can create a 10 cm square piece over three days. Scheduling is flexible, so feel free to discuss dates when making a reservation.



519 Shinden, Ako City Available WC Available 0791-45-0025

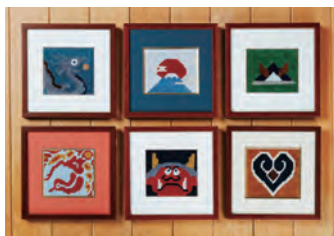
Note: The road in front of the studio is narrow; visitors are advised to come by compact car. Shuttle service is available from Banshū-Ako Station.



Tour ○ Reservation Required Experience X

C Ako Dantsu Studio Gallery Higashihama

At Ako Dantsu Studio Gallery Higashihama, great care is taken starting from the yarn-making process to express delicate patterns and unique color tones. The one-mat-sized rugs are treated as fine art pieces, offering harmony with Japanese aesthetics and suggesting ways to appreciate them as art. At the same time, the studio hopes people will enjoy Ako Dantsu in their daily lives and offers various lifestyle goods and accessories featuring Ako Dantsu patterns. The gallery, themed around a blend of Japanese and European styles, welcomes visitors not only to purchase works but also to observe the actual weaving process. Come and experience the charm of Ako Dantsu with all five senses.



69 Higashihama-cho, Ako City Available WC Available 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM 0791-25-1395

Note: Please make a reservation at least 3 days in advance for visits.

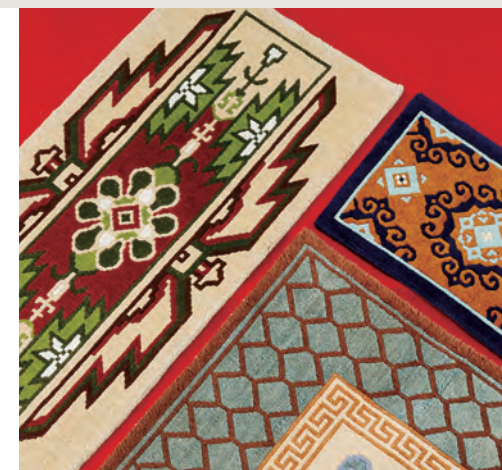


Tour ○ Reservation Required Experience ○ Reservation Required HP

D Atelier ARTISAN Hitsujiunoki

In this stylish, sunlit space, a variety of Ako Dantsu works are on display. Visitors can enjoy a 90-minute hands-on experience that includes parts of the weaving process or take part in multi-day workshops to create small pieces. For those wishing to study more deeply, ongoing instruction is also available.

3109-1 Osaki, Ako City Available WC Available
Please inquire via the LINE link on the official website.



Tour ○ Reservation Required Experience X Instagram

E Ako Dantsu Studio Mutsuki

Ako Dantsu Studio Mutsuki creates works that embrace the evolving texture that comes with the passage of time. One of its key commitments is using only naturally dyed yarns, including indigo and plant-based dyes. The studio has exhibited not only in Japan but also internationally, gaining recognition worldwide.

107 Misaki, Ako City Not Available (please use nearby public lots)
WC Available Note: Please inquire via Instagram direct message.
Currently under renovation. Tours available from spring 2025.



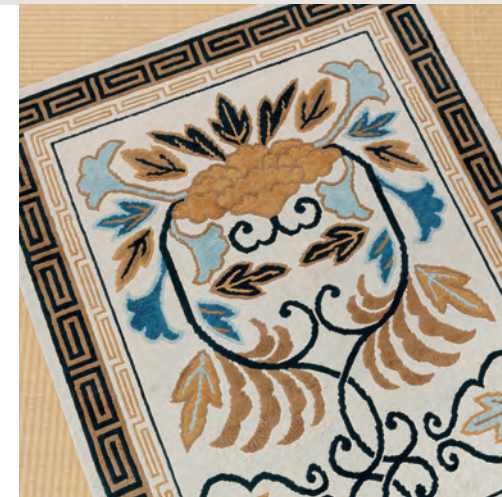
Tour ○ Reservation Required Experience △ Instagram

F Studio Tamayura



Ms. Hanafusa, who runs the studio, aims to help people become familiar with looms and the techniques of hand-weaving. The studio's workshops are designed to support complete beginners taking their first steps into weaving. As participants grow more interested, they can try their hand at creating Ako Dantsu and learn traditional techniques.

2009-1 Kariyaya, Ako City Available WC Available 090-9872-7274
Note: Visits are available only on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.
If you wish to try weaving, please begin by joining a workshop.



Tour ○ Reservation Required Experience X

G Dantsu Studio Sakoshi



Nestled in the mountains, Sakoshi Dantsu Studio is surrounded by rich nature. The artist, Ms. Yanagida, creates her works here with a vision to craft colors found nowhere else. Visitors can observe the entire creation process, which focuses on beautiful color expression, from the yarn dyeing methods to the careful selection of colors and patterns.

3016 Sakoshi, Ako City Available WC Available 0791-48-8937

