

# Hitoyoshi Kuma

# Japan heritage

The cultural properties of Hitoyoshi Kuma region have been certified to the Agency for Cultural Affairs as "Japan heritage".

This era is called "The 700 years of Sagara". This era made "Conservative and enterprising culture".  
~Hitoyoshikuma is The richest hidden village in Japan.~



## 【Introduction of the story】

The lord Sagara governed the Hitoyoshi-Kuma area during this period. This area is surrounded by the mountains of Kyushu, which are very steep. He made great use of the advantageous terrain and did not allow enemies to invade. He kept it safe for 700 years, and this is why people call this era "Sagara 700 years". In this era, all the members of the community, from the lord to the common people, participated in strengthening their community. Many Buddha statues, and shrines were built and many important and enjoyable cultural traditions were developed, like "kagura", sacred music and dance performed at shrines. In addition, the enterprising people of this area absorbed new foreign cultures which led to a culture of unique foods and games, and an improved transportation network. Throughout all of Japan, this is the only area where we even now see and experience both a spirit of protecting traditions and innovation is alive. Ryotaro Shiba, a famous Japanese novelist, said that "The hidden gems of these villages are the most beautiful in Japan".

41 cultural properties in the whole Hitoyoshi Kuma area have been certified as Japan heritage. In this page we will introduce 11 cultural properties out of them.



## National Treasure Aoi Aso Shrine



Hitoyoshi is a city replete with a great number of temples, historic sites, and cultural properties. One of these is the Aoi Aso Shrine founded in 806. With over 1,200 years of history, it is the largest shrine housing local deities in the Hitoyoshi-Kuma region. In 2008, the five structures of the Aoi Aso Shrine (the main hall, corridor, gohei offering hall, oratory, and gate) were listed as national treasures of Japan. The magnificence of the Momoyama period and its architecture are represented in the thatched-roofed entrance and the beautifully carved sculptures of the Aoi Aso Shrine.



## Kuma Shochu



In 1995, Kuma Shochu was designated a "protected designation of origin" product which is recognized internationally. "Kuma," the first in Japan, and two other brands of shochu were also recognized as regionally designated brand names, giving them international protection.

Kuma Shochu is created using the abundant clear water of the Kuma region, and rice grown in the fertile soil. There are 28 such breweries in the Hitoyoshi-Kuma region, each competing to produce around 200 brands of shochu. There are two methods for distillation—at normal pressure, and at reduced pressure. Distillation at normal pressure gives a smooth mellowness, whereas at low pressure, this results in a lighter spirit. Please take the time to try both.



## Hitoyoshi Castle Ruins



The Hitoyoshi Castle (also known as 'Sengetsu Castle' and 'Mikazuki Castle') was the castle of the Sagara family. The Sagara family ruled the Hitoyoshi-Kuma region for nearly 700 years. Full fortification started in the mid-15th century during the warring states period, and the most recent incarnation of the castle came into existence during the rule of the twentieth Nagatsune in the early 17th century.



## Kuma River



The lord Sagara used this large river to transport people and products like rice and wood.

In the Edo era, railroad took its place but the tradition of transportation by water has survived as river-rafting.



## Hitoyoshi Hot Springs



The Hitoyoshi hot springs ('onsen') are historical sites that have records of the lord of the Sagara family having bathed there five hundred years ago. They are located along the banks of the Kuma River and are popular with locals and tourists alike. The water is mildly alkaline and carbonated, known for being good for the complexion.

## Tour of the 33 Sagara Kannon



In the Hitoyoshi-Kuma region there are a total of 35 statues of the Kannon Bodhisattva which are worshipped. They are located in the 1st to 33rd pilgrimage temples (out of the 35 pilgrimage temples). In the spring and autumn equinoctial weeks, visitors go on a pilgrimage around these 33 temples in order to accumulate merit from the Kannon. During this time, at each of the temples, the pilgrims are presented with tea and pickles thoughtfully prepared by local residents at each of the temples.



## Oikami Shrine

Oikami Shrine has been protected as the guardian god of the Sagara clan. People call it "Oikami-san," and it has been attracting people's worship.



## kannon hall of Shozen temple

It goes by the name "Neko Dera (Cat Temple)" because this is a temple dedicated to a cat monster that hounded The lord Sagara.



## Unsun-Karuta

This is a traditional Japanese card game. In the middle of the Edo era, The Tokugawa government prohibited all games and it died out in Japan except for in Hitoyoshi. Today, a private organization based in Hitoyoshi protect it.



## Amida hall of Josen Temple

It seems to have been built by the Kumes, the powerful clan in this area. It has been under the strong spirits of protection and faith by the Sagaras and other people. We can see the architectures in the Medieval period, such as halls, the principal object of worship, and stone pagodas.



## Kuma-ken

It's said that this game is the root of "rock-paper-scissors." When it's played over drinks, the loser has to drink Shochu (distilled spirits). Some people like drinking, so they lose on purpose to drink Shochu.