

The Nagara tourist train crosses the Nagara River
Photo: Courtesy of Nagaragawa Railway

Nagaragawa
Railroad



A Railway Hugging a Beautiful Clear River

Using the Nagaragawa Railway in Gifu Prefecture, you can enjoy uninterrupted views of the Nagara River, one of the most beautiful rivers in Japan. You can take a long, luxurious ride on a tourist train, or disembark along the line to explore a region with a long history and many folk crafts and traditions.

OSAMU SAWAJI

THE Nagara River, one of the so-called Three Clear-flowing Rivers in Japan, has its headwaters in the mountains of the northern region of Gifu Prefecture, located nearly in the center of Honshu, the main island of Japan. The river runs across the prefecture vertically, flowing through neighboring Mie Prefecture and into the Pacific Ocean. The Nagaragawa Railway, which winds alongside and criss-crosses the Nagara River, is a 72.1-km long rail line, connecting Mino-ota Station in Minokamo City with Hokuno Station in Gujo City.

“More than anything else, the most charming part of the Nagaragawa Railway is the Nagara River, which the railway hugs along much of the line’s length. The line is run by diesel-powered trains, so there are no electrical wires or poles. The views from the train car windows are uninterrupted, and the sight of the one- or two-car trains running along the line fits in very well with the surrounding scenery,” explains the

railway’s chief attendant, Yuka Funato.

The “Nagara” tourist train allows its passengers to thoroughly enjoy their ride along the Nagaragawa Railway. The Nagara train was designed by Eiji Mitooka, who has worked on the designs of many trains, including the 800 series Kyushu Shinkansen high speed train. The Nagara train cars are a brilliant royal red color, and the chic, Japanese-style interior features decorations made with abundant amounts of local materials.



Furnishings inside the Nagara tourist train
Photo: Satoshi Tanaka

The tables, chairs, and more are made mainly from Tono cypress wood, produced in the eastern part of the prefecture. The windows also feature cypress frames to allow guests to view the scenery from the windows as if it were a picture, and Gujo indigo-dyed curtains dyed in Gujo City hang near the train doors.

The Nagara mainly runs on Fridays, weekends, public holidays, and during the summer vacation season, running one round trip per day. You can purchase a ticket that includes lunch, giving you the chance to enjoy a meal using local ingredients, including Hida beef, Oku-Mino Kojidori chicken, and sweetfish.

“People who enjoy rafting or canoeing along the Nagara River often wave their hands or oars at the train as it passes. You could say that this kind of interaction with people is a kind of joy that is unique to the Nagaragawa Railway,” says Funado.

There are many tourist spots along the Nagaragawa Railway line, too. Seki City, where Seki Station is located, is known as an area of production for cutlery with an over 800-year history. Seki cutlery production began with Japanese swords, and later expanded to a wide variety of products, including kitchen and table knives, scissors, and more. The Gifu Cutlery Hall, near Hamonokaikanmae Station, offers approximately 2,500 items for sale, including kitchen and table knives and other kitchen goods, in addition to displaying cutlery products produced in Seki. At the Seki Sword Tradition Museum, Japanese swords and custom-made knives are on display, and demonstrations of traditional Japanese sword forging are also given.

Mino City, home of Minoshi Station, is famous as a production area for Mino Washi paper, boasting a history of 1,300 years. In the city, houses built between the Edo period (1603-1867) and the Meiji period (1868-1912) line the streets, making up an area known as the Udatsu-lined Old Streets, designated as one of the National Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings. “Udatsu” are walls constructed at both ends of the roof of a large house that were originally designed to prevent fires from spreading. Over time, merchants incorporated artistic elements into the udatsu as symbols of their wealth.

Since 1994, the Mino-Washi Akari Exhibition has



A section of Udatsu-lined Old Streets
Photo: Satoshi Tanaka



An exhibition of Mino-Washi lamps at
Mino-Washi Akari Art Gallery
Photo: Satoshi Tanaka

been held every year in the middle of October at the Udatsu-lined Old Streets (October 12-13 this year). At this art exhibition, approximately 500 artistic lamps made using Mino Washi paper are on display, submitted by artists from all over Japan, enveloping the town in a dreamlike atmosphere. At the Mino-Washi Akari Art Gallery, approximately eighty pieces are on display from among the lamps selected as excellent works of art.

“These works of art, made with a variety of techniques such as layering and folding of the paper, realize the huge potential inherent in washi paper,” says Hidetaka Furukawa, head of the Mino-Washi Akari Art Gallery.

In Gujo City, where Gujo-Hachiman Station is located, the *Gujo Odori* dances are held from July to September each year, a tradition that has continued for over 400 years. The platform of Minami-Kodakara-Onsen Station, also in Gujo, is itself the entrance to a hot spring facility, so you can soak in the hot springs right after getting off the train.

Riding the Nagaragawa Railway is an opportunity to look out at the clear waters of the Nagara River and abundant natural beauty while taking in the region’s rich history and culture along the way. 

