

金沢 Kanazawa

Little Kyoto—this nickname for Kanazawa, the capital city of Ishikawa prefecture, should give you a good idea of what you can look forward to should you ever have the chance to visit.

Famous for its traditional streetscapes and crafts, Kanazawa has much to tempt travellers. It has a rich history as the centre of one of Japan's strongest feudal lords during the Edo Period. And its wealth of traditional crafts was acknowledged when it was appointed by UNESCO as a City of Crafts and Folk Art in June 2009.

Seen from a distance as above (a), Kanazawa looks much like any modern city. Closer up there are areas that speak of the city's long and rich history as a castle town (g), such as the Nagamachi samurai house area (b). Like Kyoto, Kanazawa escaped damage during WWII.

Today Kanazawa has a population of around 458,000 and it is the economic and cultural centre of the Hokuriku area (Toyama, Ishikawa and Fukui prefectures). During the 15th century, Kanazawa developed as a temple town. Then in the early 1580s, the city came under the rule of the Maeda clan. From here on the city flourished. For the almost 300 years that the Maeda clan ruled the Kaga (Ishikawa) area, the income derived from the lands under the family's control made the head of the Maeda clan the richest *daimyō* (feudal lord) in Japan. The arrival of Toshiie Maeda in 1583 is commemorated today by the annual Hyakumangoku Festival (e).

The Maeda *daimyō* fostered culture, encouraging Confucian scholarship, bringing artisans to the city and promoting gardening and pottery. Kenroku-en pictured here (f) with irises in full bloom is considered one of Japan's top three gardens. The local Kutani-yaki is one of Japan's most highly regarded ceramics—porcelain wares known for their coloured enamel glazes.

Another craft for which Kanazawa is famous throughout Japan is the manufacture of gold leaf and decorating products with the leaf (c). Probably appropriate given that Kanazawa means marsh of gold, today the city accounts for 99% of national gold leaf production and 100% of silver and platinum leaf, all known as *Kanazawa-haku*.

Craft tourism has been developed and you can observe or try hands-on experiences such as decorating with gold leaf (d) or even *kaga-yuzen* which is a beautiful silk-dyeing technique.

This really is only a surface glimpse of what Kanazawa has to offer. The city still actively looks to promote culture and boasts the 21st Century Museum of Modern Art, designed by the world renowned Japanese architects SANAA and opened in 2004.

Kanazawa is already well connected by public transportation, but from 2014 the Hokuriku Shinkansen will make getting there even easier.

For more information on Kanazawa

The **Kanazawa City Tourism Association** website is well laid out and illustrated, and highly informative—history, crafts, access, food, events and accommodation are all covered: www.kanazawa-tourism.com.

See also **Japan National Tourist Organisation** www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/regional/ishikawa/kanazawa.html

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