

# Ojiya, Niigata Prefecture

The city of Ojiya extends along the river terrace of the Shinano River at the southern end of the Echigo Plain in central Niigata Prefecture. It is the birthplace of *nishikigoi* (ornamental carp), known as “swimming jewels,” and the home of a distinctive culture that includes *ojiya-chijimi* hemp fabric (designated an Important Intangible Cultural Treasure and listed by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity) and *tsunotsuki* bullfighting (designated an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Asset).



## Nishikigoi of Ojiya City



Terraced ponds in Higashiyama area, Ojiya, for raising nishikigoi

### Origin of Nishikigoi

Around 200 years ago, rice and vegetables were grown in terraced fields in some parts of what are today the cities of Ojiya and Nagasaki. Reservoirs were created on the upper terraces as a source of water for farming and to raise carp for food in the winter. A mutation in these carp created different colors and patterns. With repeated breeding since then, those carp evolved into the beautiful nishikigoi of today.

### How to Keep Nishikigoi

Nishikigoi are easy to keep, as long as you follow the basics, including proper feeding, using a filtration device, and changing the water. Nishikigoi have a gentle nature and easily become accustomed to people. They grow to fit the size of the container and number of fish being kept. Thus, they can be raised to the ideal size by adjusting the rearing environment. They will grow big if kept in a garden pond or can be raised in a glass tank for keeping indoors or on a veranda.



Photos by Gekkan Nishikigoi magazine



### Varieties of Nishikigoi

Nishikigoi can be defined as, “carp with colors and spotted patterns kept for ornamental enjoyment.” There are many variations, totaling as many as 80 types. The *kohaku*, *taisho sanshoku*, and *showa sanshoku* varieties are especially popular. The *kohaku* has a white body with red markings. The *taisho sanshoku* is characterized by a pattern of black spots on what would otherwise be a *kohaku*. The *showa sanshoku* is also red, white, and black, but it has a lot of black in lines or covering large areas with the pattern often extending to the belly.

Photos by Shin Nippon Kyoiku Tosho Co., Ltd.

### Nishikigoi Shows in Niigata Prefecture

Nishikigoi shows are held across Niigata Prefecture from September to early November. The biggest is the Niigata Prefecture Koi Show held in Ojiya. In the show, competitors vie for prizes in a total of 165 categories, 11 according to variety and 15 according to body length, from 15 cm to over 80 cm. The Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Prize is awarded for one fish that is the overall winner.

**Show Information**  
Date: A weekend in late October or early November every year  
Venue: Community Plaza, Ojiya City Gymnasium



## Highlights

Nishikigoi no Sato (the hometown of Nishikigoi) is a symbolic establishment in Ojiya. It is the world's only nishikigoi museum, where you can always enjoy nishikigoi up close and learn about their history, varieties, and how to keep them.



The indoor pond in the large dome-shaped display building has 110 nishikigoi (about 20 varieties) bred in Ojiya.



The pond in the Japanese garden has around 140 nishikigoi on loan from their owners.

## Crafts

Ojiya-chijimi fabric was created in the early Edo Period (1603-1868). The weft threads are twisted tightly to create fine wave-like wrinkles called *shibo* as the fabric shrinks. Exposure to snow sharpens the fabric's whiteness.



## Experiences

### Ojiya Textile Workshop

The Ojiya Textile Workshop has an exhibition gallery introducing the history and techniques of *ojiya-chijimi*. You can also watch weaving demonstrations and try weaving your own coaster. Kimono accessories, interior decorating items, tableware, clothes and other goods are sold on the second floor.



## Food



### Ramen

Ramen shops are common in snowy regions of Japan like Ojiya. In the fiercely competitive area called “Ramen Street” along National Route 117, shops compete against each other with original flavors.

### Hegi Soba

Hegi soba uses a type of seaweed called *funori*, which is used as a stiffener when weaving *ojiya-chijimi*, as the binding agent. It gets its name from the tray it is served on, which is called “hegi.”



## Gifts

Nishikigoi is the city fish of Ojiya. And it is clearly loved by residents, as it is used in numerous items, from merchandise to sake. Also, you mustn't miss local specialties such as hegi soba and the local rice.

### Hegi Soba

Dried hegi soba made from buckwheat grown locally in Ojiya is available in packages featuring nishikigoi.



### Rice

*Ojiyamai*, a brand of *koshihikari* rice from Uonuma, is the pride of Ojiya, grown in rich land soaked with pure water in a climate with harsh temperature extremes between day and night.



### Nishikigoi merchandise

The ornaments, pin badges, lacquered chopsticks, mug cups, towels, trays, and other items with nishikigoi motifs are popular gifts from Ojiya.



### Sake

The thriving local sake breweries use *koshitanrei*, a variety of rice suitable for sake brewing grown in Ojiya. Some have labels with nishikigoi designs.

