



A traditional fishing method on the Nagara River that has been passed down for over 1300 years

"Cormorant Fishing on the Nagara River in Gifu"

Event duration May 11th - October 15th

History

Ukai (cormorant fishing) is a fishing method in which cormorant fishing masters manipulate cormorants to catch fish, and it has a history of over 1,300 years. During the Sengoku period, Oda Nobunaga, who was based in Gifu, is said to have used cormorant fishing as a form of entertainment for guests and granted the title of Usho (cormorant fishing master) to the fishermen, thereby protecting the practice. Additionally, Tokugawa Ieyasu is known to have enjoyed observing ukai and had ayu (sweetfish) sushi regularly transported from Gifu to Edo (present-day Tokyo), which contributed to the careful preservation of the ukai tradition throughout the ages.

Usho

cormorant fishing master

There are six usho of the Nagara River, all of whom have been appointed as 'Cormorant Fishing Masters of the Imperial Household Agency Board of Ceremonies.' In addition to handling up to twelve cormorants at a time, they also control the ubune (cormorant fishing boats), and torches, requiring advanced skills that are passed down from parent to child. Moreover, their attire has remained largely unchanged since the Edo period, preserving the tradition to this day.

Usho's Family Trade Names

- Maruwa
- Maruyama
- Yamajo
- Maruyo
- Wachigai
- Maruichi

Kazaori Eboshi (Wind-folded Hat)

A black or navy linen cloth is wrapped around the head to protect it from the bonfire.

Koshimino (Grass Skirt)

Made of straw, it deflects water splashes and protects the body from getting cold.

Ryofuku (Fishing Clothes)

Made of black or navy cotton.

Mune-ate (Bib)

Used to protect the chest from sparks and pine tree resin. Could also be used as a pocket.

Ashinaka (Half-length Slippers)

Footwear made of straw. Slippers that are half the length of ordinary slippers and are designed to not slip on fish oil or water scale deposits.

Kagari-bi (Bonfire)

The iron basket used to burn the bonfire is called a kagari, and the bright flames are fueled by red pine, which contains a lot of oil that does not extinguish easily, even in rain or wind.

U (Cormorant)

The flames startle the ayu, and as they move the u quickly catch them.

Usho (Cormorant Fishing Master)

Naka-nori (Middle Rower)

Supports the usho

Tomo-nori (Rear rower)

In charge of steering the cormorant fishing boat

Tanawa (Rope)

The rope that connects the usho and the cormorant is called a tanawa, and it is connected to the kubi-yui (neck tie), which is wrapped around the cormorant's neck and abdomen.

Ubun

Cormorant fishing boat

The fishing boat that the usho rides is a double-ended riverboat approximately 13 meters in length. It is made of about 70 water-resistant planks of kouyamaki (Japanese umbrella pine wood) connected with about 1,250 nails. In addition to the usho, there are two other boatmen called tomo-nori and naka-nori on board, and the three of them go down the river catching ayu.

Usho live alongside their cormorants, training them for 2-3 years to become skilled birds. The cormorants that live with them tend to have longer lifespans than their wild counterparts, sometimes reaching up to 20 years. The neck tying technique is an important skill for the usho, as it determines the day's catch.

The ayu caught by the cormorants are instantly squeezed by their beaks, which helps maintain their freshness, making them highly regarded for their excellent taste. Ayu that have marks from the cormorant's beak are known as uayu and are treated as a high-quality product.

Ayu

Nationally Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property
Designated as "Nagara River Cormorant Fishing Techniques"

Nationally Important Tangible Folk Cultural Property
Designated as "A Complete Set of 122 Tools Used for Cormorant Fishing on the Nagara River"

Japan Heritage

Recognized as "An Ancient Castle Town with the Spirit of Nobunaga's Hospitality - Gifu"

Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems

Recognized as "Ayu of the Nagara River System, Japan"

Nationally Important Cultural Landscape

Selected as "Cultural Landscape of Gifu in the Middle Basin of Nagara River"

Announcement from Gifu City

◆ 3rd Gifu Nagara River Fireworks Festival

Date: Saturday, August 9, 2025 Back-up date: August 23, 2025

Fireworks Cheering Seat Tickets

Hometown Tax Return Gift Handling Period: Until June 30

Gifu City Resident Priority Lottery Sales: May 17 - June 13

General First-Come-First Served Sales (ends when sold out): July 9 - August 9

Fireworks Cheering Seats: Nagara River north bank riverbed (Nagara Bridge - Kinka Bridge)

*Tickets are required to watch from the Fireworks Cheering seats.

◆ An Evening of Traditional Culture: Nagaragawa Takigi Noh

Date: Saturday, September 6, 2025, 18:00 - 20:00

◆ Gifu City Museum of History

Exhibition information

Planned Exhibition	The Archaeology of Harvest The Beginnings of Agriculture in the Mino Region	Until Sunday, May 25th
Planned Exhibition	The Edo Book World The Publishing Culture That Blossomed in Gifu	June 7 (Saturday) - July 27 (Sunday)
Special Exhibition	Gifu Castle and Oda Nobunag Considering the Appearance of Gifu Castle through Excavation Findings	August 8th (Friday) - October 13th (Monday, National Holiday)
Featured Exhibition	Tools Everyday Life in the Showa Era Through the Eyes of Children	June 28 (Saturday) - October 22 (Wednesday)