

# Enjoying Japanese Tea Service at a Roadside Station at a Center of Green Tea Production

Kawane-honcho Town in Shizuoka Prefecture is well-known as the center of tea production for the acclaimed Kawane-cha variety of Japanese green tea. A popular roadside station within the town offers visitors the experience of Japanese tea service with locally made sweets.

(Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

In the central Shizuoka Prefecture town of Kawane-honcho, a roadside station called Forêt<sup>1</sup> Nakakawane Chameikan provides a community space where visitors can relax and enjoy themselves as they deepen their knowledge of tea and the history of the local Kawane-cha. Facility director Goto Yasuhisa shares his thoughts on what gives this representative local specialty, Kawane-cha, its appeal.

“Above all, it’s delicious. Our town is located in the upper basin of the Oi River, with its source north of here in the Southern Alps. We’re blessed with very favorable conditions for cultivating high-quality tea,

including drastically different daytime and nighttime temperatures, soft sunlight that shines in between the mountains, and mist that comes off the Oi River. Plus, with the efforts of the many dedicated tea producers here who have won multiple awards at national tea competitions, we can ensure the ongoing production of high-quality tea.”

The facilities attracted around 15,000 annual visitors on average, in pre-COVID figures from 2018 and earlier. Along with local area residents, sightseers come from other parts of the prefecture and country, followed by a growing number of visitors from around







Left: A view of the Japanese garden from the tearoom, a space fragrant with solid beams of locally grown *hinoki* cypress.

Above center: A lecture is given to visitors as part of their first-hand experience with Japanese tea in the tearoom.

Below center: A popular tea set allowing visitors to enjoy Japanese green tea Kawane-cha, with a choice of two varieties of tea leaves: Yabukita or Okuhikari.

Right: Kawane-cha tea leaves. Ordinary green tea is made by heating, rolling and drying harvested tea leaves.

the world. A particularly popular attraction is *tei-cha* service, a casual tea ceremony where Japanese green tea is served with special local confections in a tearoom with views of a Japanese garden. Many visitors appreciate the opportunity to enjoy Kawane-cha, a distinguished, premium brand of tea, affordably and casually.

Mr. Goto explains, “We try to teach visitors the basics of brewing Japanese green tea, so that they can experience the true, delicious flavor of Kawane-cha which they can enjoy it at home as well. We have them put tea leaves in a *kyusu* teapot and steep them in hot water, enjoying the different flavors of first, second, and third infusions as well. Gradually adjusting the method of brewing – the way of pouring the water, its temperature, the steeping time – yields variations in the tea’s umami, fragrance, and so on.” Refreshing flavor, fragrant tea aroma, then smooth, rich umami. This is a time to taste appreciatively the delicious complexity of Kawane-cha in the quiet tearoom, starting from adding the tea leaves to the pot – surely a special experience for visitors, to enjoy the flavor of tea right in the area where it’s produced.



Above left: Pouring the tea out to the very last drop: one key to attaining the best flavor.

Above right: The Midori no Tamatebako shop stocks Kawane-cha tea and other local specialties.

Below: Local tea producers provide explanations during a *tei-cha* tea service.

Local volunteers also hold an ongoing series of monthly events to promote Kawane-cha. Participants include distinguished tea-growing families, specialized tea merchants, and local confectioners. The all-day events held on the facilities’ grass lawn square are reportedly popular and lively, with attractions including handmade soba, freshly baked bread, and *bento* lunches, market stalls offering general goods, and more.

Mr. Goto says, “Here, you can meet energetic locals who are from the community who are committed to promoting Kawane-cha. Further north are a number of popular sightseeing destinations, including the Yume no Tsuribashi suspension bridge in the Sumatayko Gorge and the Oigawa Railway’s Okuoikojo Station. Be sure to stop in here on your way, though, to enjoy some delicious Kawane-cha tea. Energetic local homemakers who largely operate the Midori no Tamatebako shop are sure to engage you in lively conversation about the local specialties they stock!” 7

Left page

Left: A view of the Forêt Nakakawane Chameikan. Characterized by its simple, rustic warmth, the structure blends in with its natural setting near the Oi River, surrounded by deep-green mountains

Above right: Tea fields, like these neighboring the Forêt Nakakawane Chameikan and located throughout the town, offer scenes of tranquil beauty.

Below right: New tea leaves start to grow at the outset of spring. Tea made from leaves harvested at this stage is called *shincha* (first-flush “new tea”).

1. The name *forêt* comes from the French for forest.