

A Summer Festival for Enjoying the Sound of Furin Wind Chimes

In Japan, when the season turns to summer, people hang small bells called *furin* from the edges of eaves, providing pleasant, charmingly refreshing sounds when the breeze makes them sway. Every summer, Okawachiyama, an area surrounded by mountains on three sides located in Imari City, Saga Prefecture, holds a festival to provide visitors and participants with the enjoyable tones of traditional porcelain¹ *furin*.
(Text: Morohashi Kumiko)



Left: A Nabeshima ware wind chime, offering the high-pitched clarity characteristic of porcelain chimes

Center: Wind chime made of white porcelain with a clear or transparent look, featuring hand-painted designs with base colors of red, blue, yellow, and so on.

Right: A wind chime with openwork

Ceramics currently made mainly with porcelain produced in Imari City, Saga Prefecture are called Imari-yaki (Imari ware). Located in the southern part of Imari City, Okawachiyama is a center of Imari ware production, home to 30 potteries. Each summer, the village holds the *Furin Matsuri* (Wind Chime Festival). To learn more about the festival, we spoke with Hara Takanobu of the Imari and Nabeshima Ware Cooperative Association.

“During the festival, more than 1,000 wind chimes hang from the edges of eaves of residents’ houses, shops selling porcelain wares, and other places. The event gives people a chance to experience the cool, refreshing clarity of the chimes’ sounds. When we first held the festival in 2004, there were only a few types of chimes in use, but the number has increased year by year to where now more than 500 types are used.

While Japanese *furin* wind chimes can be made with a variety of materials, including metal, ceram-

ics², and glass, the chimes appearing in this festival are made with porcelain, a material using stones as its raw ingredient. A colorful variety of narrow *tanzaku* strips of paper hang from the chimes, and when the breeze causes them to sway, porcelain bell clappers called *zetsu* will make contact with the chimes, producing tones of high-pitched clarity.

“An interesting thing about ceramic wind chimes is the way each one produces a different sort of tone. Smaller chimes will make high-pitched sounds, and the tone of the chimes with openwork is much higher-pitched,” he explains.



Left: Okawachiyama area, surrounded by mountains on three sides

Right: Painting designs on porcelain wind chimes by hand

As porcelain has glassy base materials, it produces metallic sounds when struck. Accordingly, when made into wind chimes, it is said to yield tones with more of a cool, refreshing clarity. Many people attend the Wind Chime Festival with the aim of hearing such sounds.

The City of Imari is known as one of Japan's representative centers of porcelain production, and within the city, the area of Okawachiyama boasts a particularly special history.

The Nabeshima Clan that once governed what is now Saga Prefecture established a new kiln in Okawachiyama in 1675. Thereupon, they began to produce what was the finest quality porcelain of the time, making gifts for the Tokugawa shogunate, and producing wares for the daily use of the feudal lords. For this reason, among types of Imari ware, porcelain produced in Okawachiyama came to be known as Nabeshima-yaki³ (Nabeshima ware) after the clan name of the ruling feudal lords.

Even today, Okawachiyama is home to many potteries, applying new techniques as well as the traditional skills of Nabeshima-yaki, making it the center of Imari ware production. We asked Mr. Hara about the wind chimes that appear in the Wind Chime Festival here in Okawachiyama, a location with such a prestigious history.

“Most of the designs on the porcelain are hand-painted, a manual task that requires careful attention to detail. Wind chimes with openwork are also created” he says.

He also recommends paying attention to the timbral qualities of the chimes' tones to get the most out of the Wind Chime Festival experience.

“The tone of each individual porcelain chime is different, so it can be fun to try to find the chime that

makes you feel comfortable. Visitors also have the option of trying hand-painting chimes to make their own original wind chime. I hope people will make the trip here and experience the charms not only of Imari ware, but also of the scenery of this area surrounded



The 18th annual Wind Chime Festival (*Furin Matsuri*) will be held in 2023

on three sides by mountains and the cool, refreshing clarity of the chiming tones of *furin*,” he concludes.

Wind chimes created at over 30 potteries where the old traditions of the Nabeshima Clan's pottery are still carefully maintained, resounding with tones of cool, refreshing clarity in Okawachiyama, an area surrounded by deeply verdant mountains — a rich summer tradition that one would hope to experience to their heart's content. **▼**

1. Porcelain vessels are made with raw materials including powdered stone rather than clay and are then glazed and fired. The base material is generally white, and vividly colored overglaze enamels are applied that make effective use of this white base color. Ceramics, meanwhile, are fired using colored clay as the base material. The color tone of the clay then comes through in the fired pottery.
2. Pottery fired using colored clay as the base material. It is characterized by the way the color of the clay comes through in the fired pottery, the overall thickness it has.
3. A particular form of Imari ware, also known as *Nabeshima yoshiki* (Nabeshima style).