

The ancient breath of Asamiya Tea



The tea plantations of Asamiya

The hills of Asamiya have been growing tea for over 1200 years, but there's nothing ancient about the way it tastes. It's bold, clean, and alive – as if the land itself has something to say.

Shigaraki, famous for its pottery, was once just as known for its tea. And here in the highlands of Koka City, Shiga Prefecture, where the nights are cold and the mornings drip with thick, milky fog, Asamiya Tea has held its ground for centuries. Locals will tell you, without hesitation, "The best Uji tea doesn't come from Uji. It comes from Asamiya."

This is tea country – not in the polite, porcelain-cup kind of way – but in the way that speaks of soil, sweat, and generations of relentless craft. The altitude here sits at around 400 meters, just low enough to catch the fog but high enough to force the plants to work for it. The cold snaps at night, the baking sun during the day – it's brutal, and it's perfect. The struggle makes the tea taste better.

At Shoryuen, one of Asamiya's legacy tea farms, the morning air is thick with mist. The owner, Mr. Akihiko Hattori, doesn't bother with ceremony. He hands over a steaming cup, no words, just a look – as if to say, this will tell you everything you need to know. And it does. The first sip hits like a current of energy, waking up something primal in your body. The flavor is deep, unharmed, and complex, lingering long after you swallow. It doesn't taste like any other tea in Japan. It tastes like Asamiya – unfiltered, unapologetic.



Mr. Akihiko Hattori - Plantation owner working in the plantation at Shoryuen

The soil here is part of the story. Beneath the tea fields lies ancient clay, the same clay that has fueled Shigaraki's centuries-old pottery tradition. This soil has a fingerprint, and it shows up in everything it touches – the tea, the pottery, the air itself. Locals call it *ttschi no noi* – the smell of earth. It's everywhere.



Shigaraki ware and Asamiya tea; A Perfect Pairing of Tradition and Craftsmanship

Higher up in the hills, hidden among the trees, sits Senzeriji Temple – the birthplace of Asamiya Tea. This is where it all started 1200 years ago, when Emperor Saga had tea seeds planted on Mount Isaya. The temple is quiet, the air heavy with history. There's a stone monument marking the tea's origin, weathered and moss-covered, but still standing. You get the feeling the tea remembers.

Even Matsuo Basho, Japan's most famous haiku poet, came through here. He wrote about the sound of tea-picking in Asamiya, about the cuckoo calls echoing in the hills. That was centuries ago – but the sound, the tea, the air – it's all still here. Unchanged.



Senzeriji in Asamiya - is one of the sites in Japan where tea production began

Asamiya Tea doesn't taste like a product; it tastes like a place. You taste the altitude, the clay, the ancient hands that have cultivated it for generations. There's no pomp, no pretense. Just raw, unfiltered craftsmanship.

And when you leave, you carry that taste with you – like the land itself has left something behind in your mouths. As if Asamiya refuses to be forgotten.



Poponta is the official mascot character of the Shigaraki Town Tourism Association. This adorable raccoon symbolizes Shigaraki's traditional pottery and culture. Catch up with him at the events and festivals in Shigaraki.