

# Welcome to SOKA



Mayor of Soka  
Masashi Asai

Soka City is located in the southeast part of Saitama Prefecture and is adjacent to Tokyo. It is blessed with good transportation access with the TOBU SKYTREE Line, which provides direct service to the Tokyo Metro (subway) Hibiya and Hanzomon lines, crossing it north-south and the Tokyo Gaikaku Kanjo Doro ring road transversing it east-west. After a municipal system (the 21st in the prefecture) was established in Soka on Nov. 1, 1958, when the population was 34,878, its economy grew rapidly as urbanization progressed precipitously, and the population exceeded 100,000 in 1968. Today it is over 240,000.

Soka flourished as a post town on the Nikko Road during the Edo period (1603 to 1868), and haiku master Matsuo Basho wrote in "The Narrow Road to Oku," "We barely managed to reach the post town of Soka by nightfall." Also, the Soka senbei (rice cracker), which has been produced since the Edo period, is one of the most famous products of the city and it has high name recognition throughout Japan. The Soka Matsubara Walking Trail, which was selected as one of the top 100 roads in Japan, is located along the Ayase River, which touches the Nikko Road that runs through the middle of the city. This road lined with 634 pines stretching approx. 1.5 kilometers is a place of relaxation and refreshment for city residents and a symbol of Soka. In March 2014, the Japanese government designated it as a national scenic beauty, calling it "Soka Matsubara, a scenic spot of Oku-no Hosomichi".

This "Town Guide Map Soka" introduces Soka's public facilities, medical institutions and the like, as well as the city's charms and features such as its history and local industries. We would appreciate it if you learned about and developed a fondness for Soka.

## History

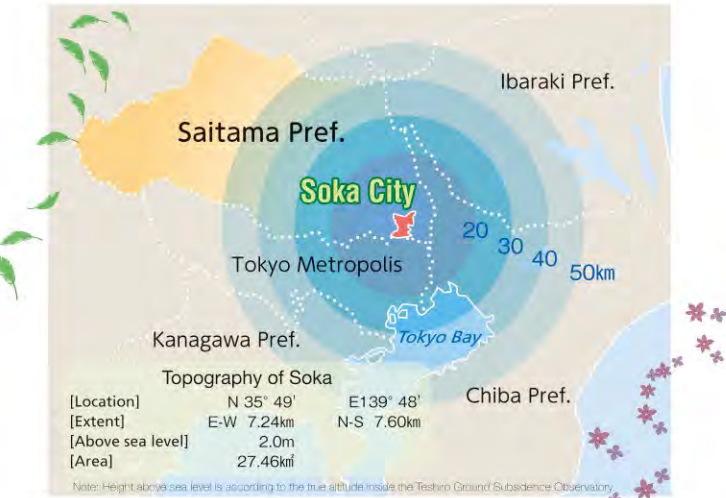
It is estimated that people began living in the Soka City limits during the Kofun period (approx. third to sixth century). The name Soka first appears in history during the Kamakura period (1185 to 1333). There is a document in existence that says the Hojo clan donated Yakougo land on the outskirts of Soka to Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gu Shrine. In 1603, when the Tokugawa shogunate began, permission was given for this land to be developed as new rice paddies, almost all the wetlands were reborn as abundant rice paddies, and almost all of them became part of the fief of the shogunate.

The post town of Soka (Sokashuku) opened in 1630, and it was busy because of the shogun's visits to Nikko Toshogu Shrine and Sankin-kotai (system of alternate attendance by a daimyo in Edo). Water transport on the Ayase and the Naka rivers also developed to carry agricultural produce to Edo (Tokyo). It flourished as the economic and cultural center of neighboring districts.

With the implementation of the municipal system, Soka Town was created along with five villages, and in 1899 with the opening of the Tobu Railway, it started down the road to modernization. In addition, the industries of Soka senbei (rice crackers), leather and yukatas were created, not to mention agriculture, and the foundation of today's traditional industries was laid.

In 1958, Soka's population had reached 34,878 and it became the 21st city in the prefecture to implement a municipal system. In 1963, the Matsubara Housing Complex, said to be the largest in the East, was completed. On March 18, 2014, Soka Matsubara was designated as a Scenic Spot of "Oku-no Hosomichi", National Scenic Beauty. 2018 was the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the municipal system.

Through mutual use of the railroad it became convenient to get to the center of Tokyo from Soka, taking just about 40 minutes, and today more than 240,000 people reside in Soka.



## Historic Road

Soka Matsubara is a row of pine trees along the Ayase River, which flows north-south in central Soka City. It is located on the north side of the what used to be the post town of Soka on the Nikko Road, and one theory holds that the trees were planted in 1683 when the Ayase River was being improved.

In 1689, it appeared in Matsuo Basho's "Oku-no-Hosomichi (The Narrow Road to Oku)" as part of the journey the work describes. Matsuo Basho set out from Fukagawa in Edo, traveled north on the Nikko Road, and passed through Sokashuku, the post town of Soka, while going to Mutsu Province (the Tohoku region).

Soka Matsubara has been maintained since the Edo period, additional trees were planted repeatedly, and today it is has reached about 1.5 kilometers in length. The tree-lined street that runs along the river includes several old trees with a trunk circumference of 2 meters and makes for a magnificent scene. In March 2014, the Japanese government designated Soka Matsubara, a National Scenic Beauty for being elegant scenery that conveys the atmosphere of the era of "The Narrow Road to Oku."



**The former post town of Soka (Sokashuku)**

The Edo period (1603 to 1868)  
(Supplemental record of the journey)  
\*Refer to the collection of the Matsuo Basho History and Culture Museum

The Meiji period (1868 to 1912)

**Changing Soka Matsubara**

1962

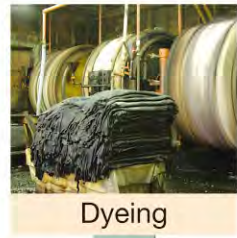
The present

## Leather & Yukata (Dyeing)

In Soka, there is another excellent local industry besides the senbei (rice cracker) industry. Industries that use a lot of water for manufacturing developed in Soka, which is near the major consumption area of Tokyo and has abundant high-quality water available. Prominent examples are the leather industry and the dyeing industry.



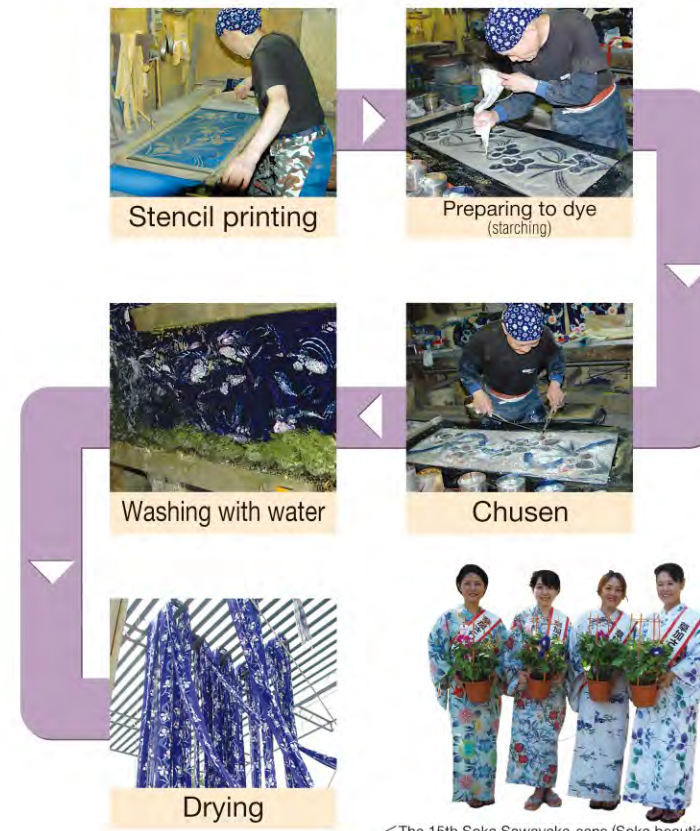
Soka's leather-related industries are among the largest in Japan in terms of amount shipped, and the city has every technology from dyeing to ironing, cutting, sewing and product processing represented. These techniques are used to manufacture a wide variety of leather products including shoes, bags, clothing, accessories and interior design items in Soka, and in recent years, environmentally friendly "eco leather" also has been made there.



### The manufacturing process



### The manufacturing process



<The 15th Soka Sawayaka-sans (Soka beauties)>

## Rice cracker (Senbei)



Soka has long been blessed with good rice and water and used to be called "Soka the rice-producing place." In the Edo period (1603 to 1868) when Soka became a post town, left-over rice that had been formed into dumpling shapes as a preserved food began to be sold as senbei (rice crackers) and became widely known as a noted product. Senbei, which had been coated with salt or miso around that time, began to be coated with soy sauce near the end of the Edo period.

Today there are about 50 establishments manufacturing and selling senbei in Soka city. In 2006 they were certified as Honba-No-Honmono (genuine articles from the center of production), in 2007 they were registered for a regional collective trademark, and they have become a famous Soka product both in name and in reality. The process of manufacturing senbei continues to be mechanized, but they also continue to be made by hand using such age-old processes as sun drying and home baking and there are many shops where you can easily try baking them yourself.

To buy high-quality leather products and Soka Senbei directly from the factory, head to **Parisse**, a traditional industry exhibition space

Traditional Industries Exhibition Room "Parisse" (1st floor, Soka City Culture Hall)

Opening hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Entry fee: Free  
Closed: First Wednesday of the month  
Address: 1-1-5 Matsue, Soka-shi  
Contact: Tel 048-931-1970  
Means of transportation: 5 minute's walk from the East Entrance of Dokkyodaigakumae (Soka Matsubara) Station

## How senbei are made



**Products and Tourism Information Center**

Hours: 10:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.  
Entry fee: Free  
Closed: During the year-end and New Year's holidays (Dec. 29 to Jan 3)  
Address: 1978 Hikawa-cho, Soka-shi  
Contact: Tel 048-921-1800  
Getting there: Get off at Soka station and go under the West Entrance railroad bridge

- Provides information on the city, events and sightseeing, as well as guidance. Has displays on Soka's traditional industries.
- Lends out the multipurpose space in the building.
- You can pick up after 5 p.m. a certificate of residence you applied for at a Municipal Office.
- If you would like a volunteer tour guide from the Soka Post Town Guide Association to show you around the city, make a reservation in advance using the telephone number above.



National Scenic Beauty  
**Soka Matsubara**  
Scenic Spot of "Oku-no Hosomichi"

