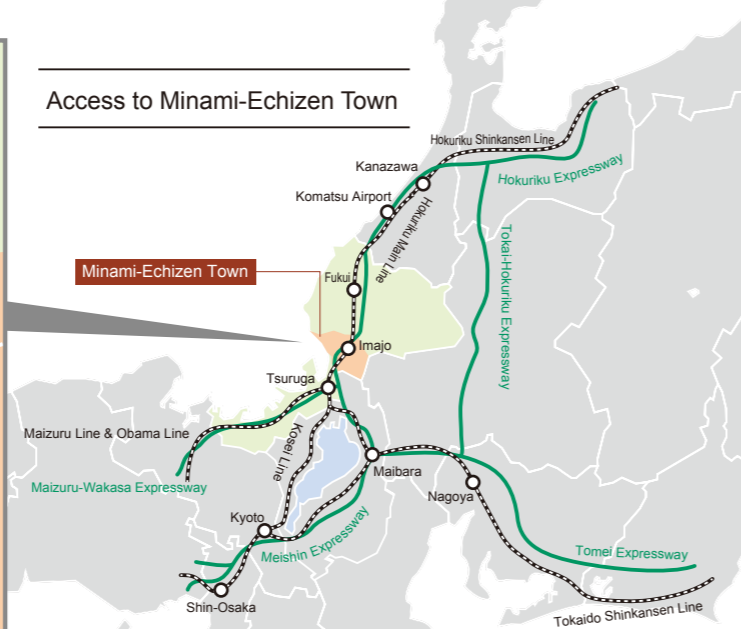




Access to Minami-Echizen Town



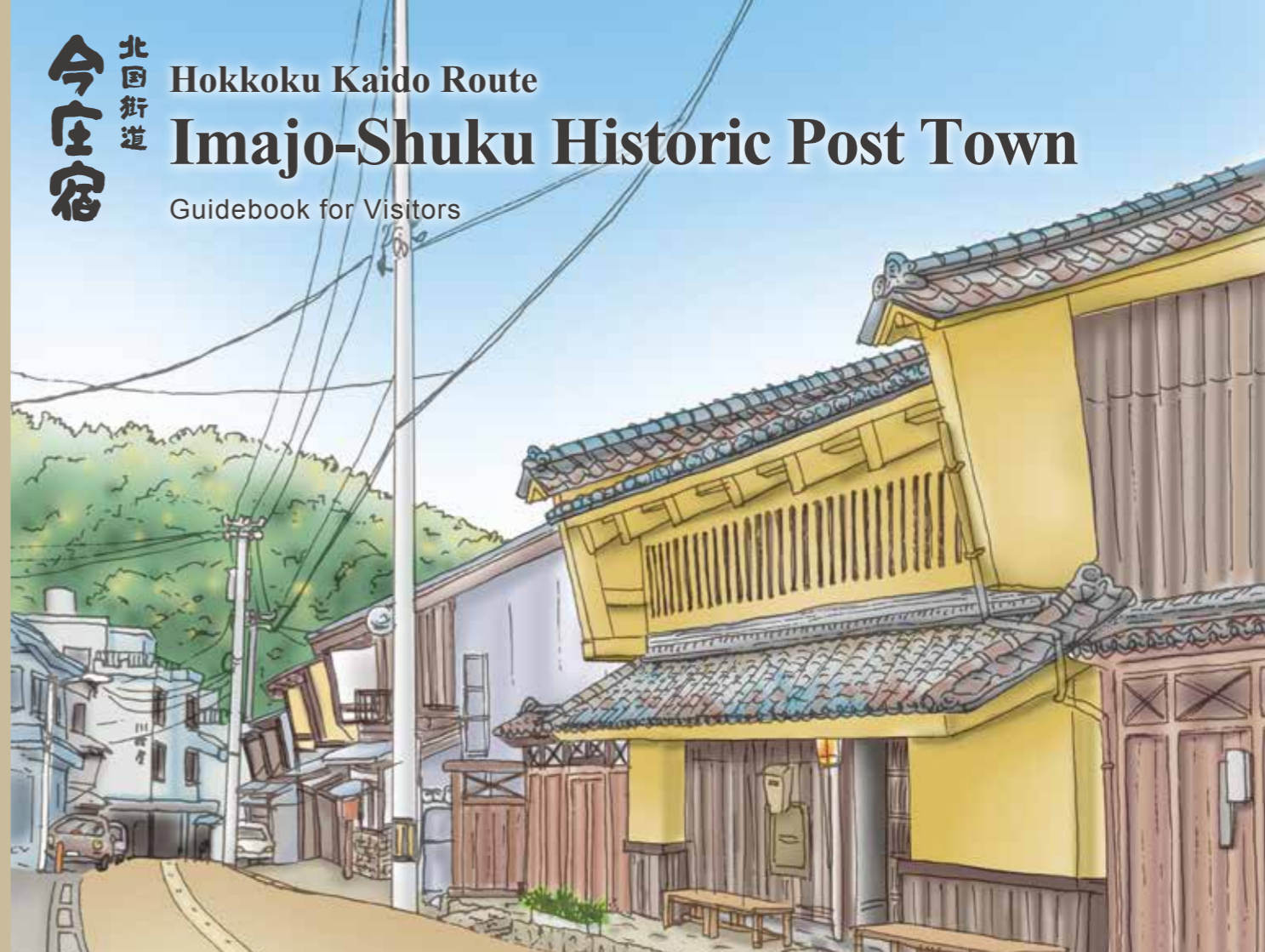
By Train	From Tokyo or Nagoya (via Maibara Sta.)	Tokaido Main Line & Limited Express on Hokuriku Main Line	JR Tsuruga Sta.	Local Train	JR Imajo Sta.
	From Tokyo via Kanazawa Sta.	JR Kanazawa Sta.	JR Takefu Sta.	Local Train	
	From Osaka	Hokuriku Shinkansen Line Limited Express on Hokuriku Main Line	JR Tsuruga Sta.	Local Train	
By Airplane	Komatsu Airport	JR Komatsu Sta.	JR Takefu Sta.	Local Train	
By Car	Imajo IC on the Hokuriku Expressway	Limited Express on Hokuriku Main Line	10 min. drive from Imajo IC to Imajo Sta.		

北国街道
今庄宿

Hokkoku Kaido Route

Imajo-Shuku Historic Post Town

Guidebook for Visitors



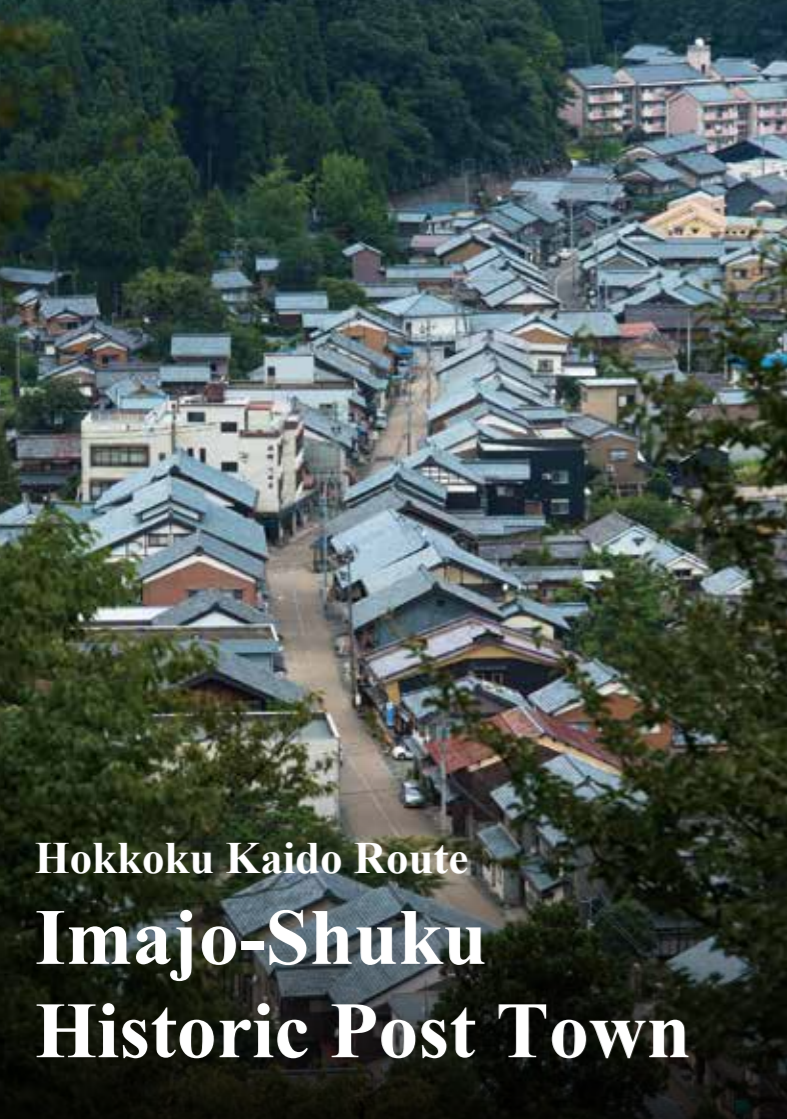
Contact Information

Minami-Echizen Town Tourism & Community Development Department
29-1 Higashi-Daido, Minami-Echizen Town,
Nanjo District, Fukui Prefecture
Tel. (0778) 47-8002

Minami-Echizen Town Imajo Sightseeing Association
74-3-1 Imajo, Minami-Echizen Town,
Nanjo District, Fukui Prefecture
Tel. (0778) 45-0074

Minami-Echizen Town Sightseeing Federation
28-2 Higashi-Daido, Minami-Echizen
Town, Nanjo District, Fukui Prefecture
Tel. (0778) 47-3414

Published March 2018



Hokkoku Kaido Route
Imajo-Shuku
Historic Post Town



There's something here in Imajo —
from the moment I first arrived here,
I felt a connection that I cannot describe.

From *Koku Henreki*, by Shugoro Yamamoto

**Once a Post Town for
Travelers Coming and Going**

The mountainous Imajo is considered one of the most treacherous parts of the Hokuriku region. The travelers who made their way through this area would first rest up in the post town of Imajo-shuku before taking on the rest of the mountain pass. Vestiges of this post town's history can still be found to this day, giving it a charming atmosphere. Enjoy a stroll through town, taking in scenery that travelers saw long ago.

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Imajo, the Entryway to Hokuetsu

Imajo, one of the most treacherous parts of the Hokuetsu region, is located at what was once the southern border of the Fukui Domain. Whenever travelers from Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo) came to the Hokuetsu region from the south, they always had to travel through Imajo, whether via Yamanaka Pass, Kinome Pass, or Tochinoki Pass. Because of its location, beyond all three of these mountain passes, Imajo has been known for ages as “the Entryway to Hokuetsu.”



History Lesson!

It's About 31.2 km from Fukui to Imajo

Back during the Edo era (1603–1868), the general rule of thumb for travelers was that men could travel about 39 km per day, and that women could travel about 31.2 km, so many travelers who left Fukui early in the morning would stay overnight in Imajo.

The Three Mountain Passes

Yamanaka Pass
The route through Yamanaka Pass was immortalized by the famous poet Otomo no Yakamochi, as collected in the *Man'yoshu*, earning it the nickname “the Man'yo road.”

Kinome Pass
This route was first established in the year 830. Many famous figures from Japanese history traveled this route, including the writer Murasaki Shikibu, the monk Shinran, the armies of the warlords Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and the poet Matsuo Basho.

Tochinoki Pass
Around the year 1578, Shibata Katsue maintained this route as the shortest way to and from Azuchi Castle, where Oda Nobunaga lived. This became a major route for both military and economic affairs for the Hokuetsu region, leading it to become known as the Hokuetsu Kaido Route.

Prosperity as One of Echizen's Finest Post Towns

Imajo-shuku is located along a forbidding mountain pass, and virtually everyone who traveled between Echizen and Kyoto or Edo (now Tokyo) would pass through this post town. A travel diary from the Edo era (1603–1868) mentions the bustling atmosphere of Imajo-shuku, with tea shops selling foods like *soba* noodles, and shopkeepers calling out to invite travelers into their businesses. A record from near the end of Japan's feudal era indicates that Imajo-shuku had 55 inns, 15 tea shops, 15 sake shops, and more, suggesting it was quite a large and prosperous post town. In addition, the number of horses mandated to be kept here was about the same as at major post towns on other main routes through the country, such as the Tokaido Route, making it clear that this was a very important post town.



The Townscape of Imajo-Shuku

The first lord of the Fukui Domain, Yuki Hideyasu, paid close attention to defending Imajo-shuku as a critical post town. The town was built along the road, and at the center of Imajo-shuku were *honjin* and *wakihonjin* accommodations for important travelers like feudal lords, *toyaba* administrative relay points for people and horses, and other important facilities.

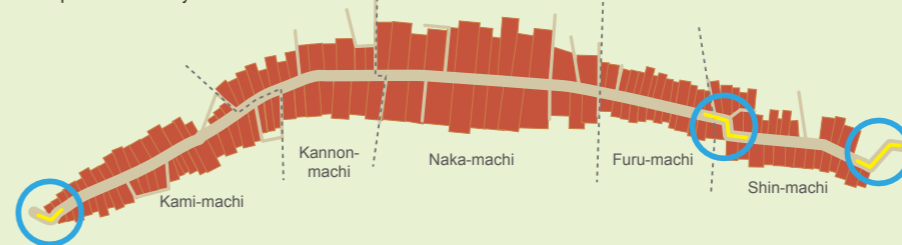
Aspects like the sections the town is divided into and the width of the road remain all but unchanged since its heyday, allowing visitors to enjoy its old-fashioned atmosphere even today.

Deep, Narrow Townhouses

Townhouses were taxed based on how wide their fronts were, so narrow townhouses reminiscent of the teeth of a comb became the norm.



The town was designed with defense in mind — these sharp corners were meant to prevent people from being able to see too far into the distance.



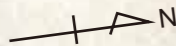
From Post Town to Railroad Town

During the Meiji era (1868–1912), the post town system was abolished, and rickshaws and carts became methods of ground transport. As a result, flat roads without too many hills became increasingly important, and in 1888, the new National Route (modern-day National Route 8) was opened. Traffic through Imajo dwindled, and the area lost its former liveliness.

However, in 1896, the railroad opened, connecting Tsuruga to Fukui. In order for trains to make it through the mountain pass between Imajo and Tsuruga, the Hokuetsu region's most difficult rail passage, they would be split and steam locomotives would be added at the Imajo railroad yard, making it an important stop along the way. As times changed and Japan modernized, Imajo was reborn as a railroad town, and its liveliness returned.

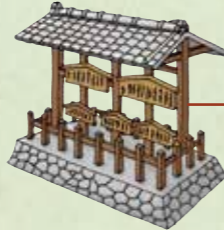
This Kilometer-Long Post Town Lives On to This Day

With the Hinogawa river to the east and the mountains to the west, the road gently curves along the natural features. The post town of Imajo-shuku feels as though it was built to fill the space between the temples and shrines in the foothills and the railroad tracks along the river.



1 Former Site of Public Notice Board

The Tokugawa shogunate government or the Fukui Domain's feudal government set aside and preserved a specific place for posting written prohibitions. There was also a reservoir nearby, to help prevent the public notice board from being burned down in the event of a fire.



2 Former Site of Toiyaba Administrative Relay Point

Toiyaba administrative relay points were incredibly important facilities at post towns. These relay points served to ensure that horses, letters, goods, and more made their way to the next post town.



Explore Imajo with a Volunteer Guide

Walking around Imajo with a volunteer guide makes a great way to get a better look at this historic post town. Whether you're interested in history, sake brewing, or the railroad, there's sure to be a plan you'll find fascinating. (Reservations required; guiding available in Japanese only)

Post Town History Railroad History ...and more!

Contact: Minami-Echizen Town Imajo Sightseeing Association
Tel. (0778) 45-0074



Former Site of Hitching Grounds

Horses were hitched here. Imajo-shuku was required to keep 24 post-horses ready at all times. These grounds were about 70 meters on each side, and surrounded by earthwork fortifications.



3 Former Site of Ofudaba Money Exchange

The Fukui Domain had a system where only paper money issued by the domain itself was allowed, so travelers and merchants passing through this post town at the domain's southern border would convert their gold and silver into paper money on their way in, or convert their Fukui Domain money into gold and silver on their way out.



Bends in the road designed to prevent people from seeing too far into the distance

Visit the Temples and Shrines of Imajo-Shuku

Temples and shrines are located all throughout Imajo. Many of the shrines are old enough that they date back to a time when Shinto and Buddhism weren't clearly divided, while the temples represent many different sects of Buddhism — a sign of the town's respect for the various faiths of the many travelers who passed through.

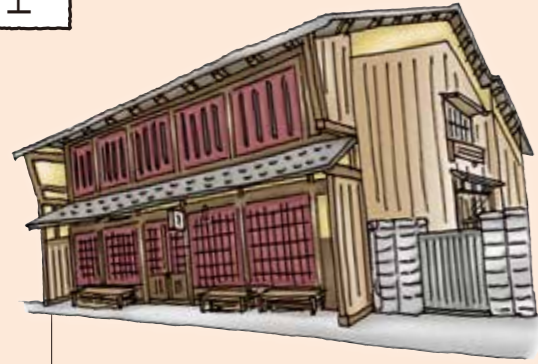
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Highlight 1
The Architecture of Imajo-Shuku

Traditional Houses of Imajo

Many of the old *machiya* townhouses in Imajo are built in a style called "*hira-iri*," with the surface of the roof visible from the front. Features like the *udatsu* and earthen walls helped prevent fires from spreading from adjacent houses, while the thick *nobori-bari* beams helped the roofs withstand the heavy snows. The fronts also feature latticework on the walls and doors.



Former Wakasaya Inn

Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property
Built during the Tenpo era (1830–1844)

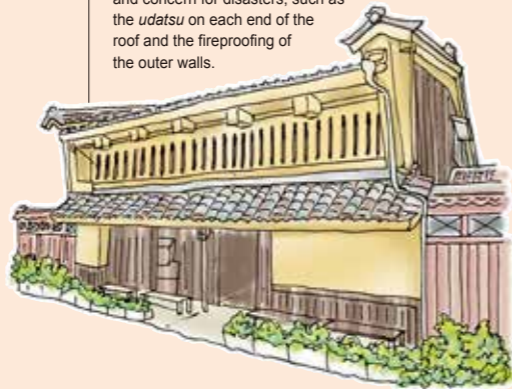
Unlike the *honjin* and *wakihonjin*, inns like these offered meals and a place to rest for ordinary travelers. By the end of Japan's feudal era, Imajo-shuku had 55 inns like this, and Wakasaya was one of the largest. Today, it is maintained by a local nonprofit organization, and it serves as a base for community development activities.

Former Residence of Kyoto Jingoro

Prefecturally Designated Tangible Cultural Property

Built during the Tenpo era (1830–1844)

Among the old *machiya* townhouses in Imajo-shuku, this one stands out in particular. During the Edo era (1603–1868), it was used for *sake* brewing, and its owner was ordered by the Fukui Domain to operate it as a *wakihonjin*, for use as accommodations, because it was a large and luxurious house belonging to one of the preeminent old families of Imajo-shuku. This is one of the oldest *machiya* townhouses in the prefecture, and it features indications of the family's considerable finances and concern for disasters, such as the *udatsu* on each end of the roof and the fireproofing of the outer walls.



Traces of the Past

A Notch Carved by a Sword during the Mito Rebellion

In 1864, Takeda Kounsai and his group of rebels, the Tengu-to, arrived in Imajo-shuku on December 9, in support of the "revere the emperor, expel the barbarians" policy. The people of Imajo-shuku hid from the Tengu-to in fear, and a hush is said to have fallen over the town. At the former residence of Kyoto Jingoro, there is still a notch carved into the wood by the sword of a masterless samurai who got drunk and a bit too spirited. Not long later, the Tengu-to surrendered in Tsuruga.

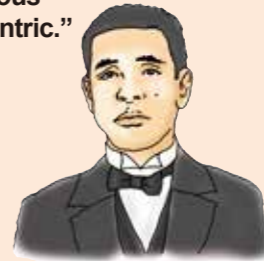


Sword Damage at the Former Residence of Kyoto Jingoro

Highlight 2
The People of Imajo

Wakichi Tanaka, a Great Man of Imajo

"Be virtuous and eccentric."



Wakichi Tanaka (1876–1933) contributed greatly to Imajo, working with partners to build up various businesses and encourage local economic development. In his later years, he used his own money to fund both the construction of the Showa Kaikan and the maintenance of the former site of the *honjin*, and established the Keijunkai foundation to help improve education and welfare in society.

Wakichi Tanaka

"Days spent worrying about other people's expectations are days spent accomplishing nothing."

"If one can no longer make use of the riches received from society, one must then pay society back without regret."

Wakichi Tanaka's Achievements



Showa Kaikan

Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property

Built in 1930 and privately funded by Wakichi Tanaka, the Showa Kaikan is located at the former site of the *wakihonjin*, and serves as a base for social education. The building features a three-story reinforced concrete structure that was groundbreaking for its time, and the facility hosted many groups as a study and training facility with overnight accommodations. Later, it was used as Imajo's town hall, and it still serves the town to this day, as both a community center and a place for people in the region to get together.

Meiji-Den & Kotokuen Garden

Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Properties



In 1932, Wakichi Tanaka had the room in the *honjin* used for Emperor Meiji's overnight stay moved and rebuilt, and had Meiji-den built here. He also had the front garden maintained as Kotokuen Garden.

Highlight 3
The Heritage of Imajo

Bunsei Guidepost at the Junction of the Hokurikudo and Hokkoku Kaido Routes

Town-Designated Historic Site

This guidepost, carved from Fukui's distinctive shakudani stone, was erected here in 1830 to mark the junction of the Hokurikudo Route (Kinome Pass) and the Hokkoku Kaido Route (Tochinoki Pass). The capstone and the space for a lantern at the top are quite unusual. The carvings on it read "Right: Road to Kyoto, Tsuruga, Wakasa" and "Left: Road to Kyoto, Ise, Edo."

"Left: Kyoto, Tsuruga, Wakasa
Right: Kyoto, Ise, Edo"



The Perfect Environment for Brewing

Narihisago

Horiguchi Brewery

Established in 1618. Their signature *sake*, Narihisago, is named for a line from a poem by the Fukui poet Tachibana Akemi.

Hijiri no Miyo

Kitazen Brewery

Established in 1716. A brewery owned by the Kitamura family, who ran the *ofudaba* money exchange, where travelers would convert gold and silver into the Fukui Domain's paper money and vice versa. Their signature *sake*, Hijiri no Miyo, is said to have been named by a high priest from Kyoto, as a prayer for peace.

Imajo's Four Sake Breweries

Hakukoma

Hakukoma Brewery

Established in 1697. This brewery was operated by the Kyoto family, who first began after being issued a license to brew *sake* by the magistrate's office of the Tokugawa shogunate. Today, they still use the techniques handed down for generations, to brew *sake* like Hakukoma.

Yuki Kirara

Hatakeyama Brewery

Established in 1835. This brewery's origins trace back to homemade cloudy *nigori sake* served at the founders' inn, leading them to focus instead on brewing. Their Yuki Kirara and Momokibune are both well known, for the care put into them by their brewer.

Imajo & Sake

Imajo's local environment offers all of the ingredients for great *sake*: pure spring water from the surrounding mountains, excellent rice, and incredibly cold winters. The *sake* of this prosperous post town served to quench the thirsts of travelers long ago, with fifteen *sake* shops here back in the Edo era (1603–1868). Today, there are still four *sake* breweries along a roughly one-kilometer stretch of road, still producing *sake* the old-fashioned way in their historic buildings.



The Taste of Travel in Hokuriku



Imajo & Soba Noodles

With its significant temperature differences between days and nights, Imajo has long been a major producer of buckwheat. As a result, buckwheat plays a major role in the local food culture, to the point where it was considered a vital everyday ingredient. Imajo's *soba* noodles are known for their firm texture and their delicious flavor. As this post town developed into a railroad town, and on through today, these noodles have been a highlight of Imajo for many travelers. Each May, the town holds the Imajo Soba Festival, as a chance for locals to show off their noodle-making skills.



Around 1930, a standing-room-only *soba* noodle shop opened on the platform of Imajo Station. Travelers could enjoy a meal while waiting for their trains, taking home memories of Imajo's delicious *soba* noodles.

Food for Travelers



Imajo Dried Persimmons



Perfect for Revitalizing Travelers

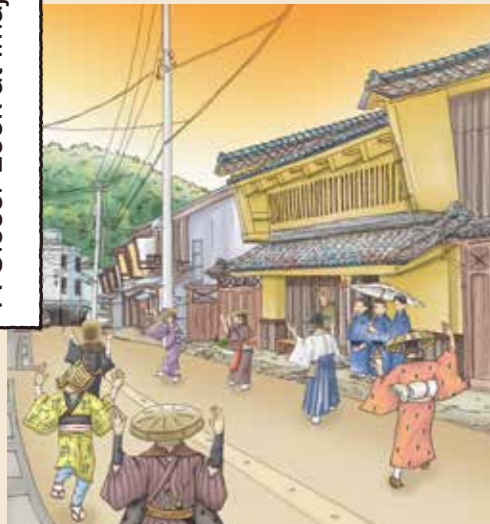
Imajo's dried persimmons have 450 years of history, and served as a valuable and convenient food for travelers along the Hokkoku Kaido Route: it was said that, no matter how hungry you were, "if you eat one, you can walk a *ri* (3.9 km), and if you eat three, you can walk three *ri* (11.7 km)." Imajo's unusual drying technique, which involves smoking the persimmons, gives them a distinctive pleasant texture and mellow sweetness.



Chameshi

Home Cooking Introduced by Travelers

Chameshi, or "tea rice," is made by mixing a combination of medium-grain rice and *mochi* rice with soy beans, then cooking it with tea (*bancha* coarse tea). It is believed that this dish originated as Nara *chameshi*, at temples like Todaiji and Kofukuji in Nara, and travelers brought this dish to Imajo. This dish is a beloved and indispensable part of important occasions in Imajo, from weddings to funerals, and is readily available for purchase during events and at souvenir shops.



A Tradition of Dancing

Prefecturally Designated Intangible Folk Cultural Property

Haneso-Odori Dance

This traditional dance began some 1,100 years ago as a dance performed by children at a temple in the western part of town; as Imajo-shuku flourished as a post town, this became a *bon-odori* dance. Travelers and locals alike would dance all through the night; today, the dancers wear various old-fashioned costumes, dressing up as merchants, travelers, samurai, monks, and more to perform this dance at events like the Imajo Summer Festival and the Kaido Roman Imajo-Shuku Festival.

A Stroll through History

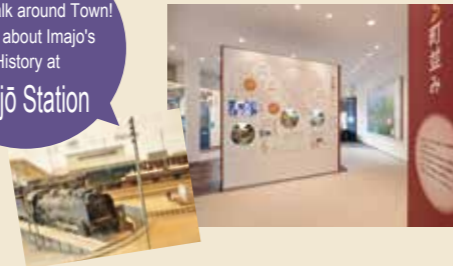
Town-Designated Historic Site

Former Site of Hiuchi Castle & Hiking Trails

Hiiguchi Castle once stood at the 270-meter peak of Mt. Atago. Built by Nishina Morihiro in 1183 by order of Kiso no Yoshinaka, to defend against the Taira Clan's army, this castle was described in the Genpei Sesuiki as "the foremost castle of the Hokuikudo Route." Today, a portion of the castle's stone walls and dry moat can still be seen. The mountaintops offer spectacular views of the entire post town, as well, so the fairly easy hiking trails from Shinra Shrine to the former site of Hiuchi Castle and Mt. Fujikura are quite popular.



Get More from
Your Walk around Town!
Learn about Imajo's
History at
Imajō Station



Imajo Local History Museum

Learn about local history, including Imajo's transition from being a post town to being a rail town. The 1:45 scale diorama of the old Imajō Station is a must-see!



Post Town Sake Assortment

Historic Brewery Quartet

An assortment of sake from Imajo's four breweries, all of which date back to the Edo era (1603–1868). The labels feature the names of the breweries' shops.

Beloved Treats for Centuries

Takano Yoshibe Shoten Umeboshi Pickled Plum Paste & Kobai-Eki Syrup

Takano Yoshibe Shoten's sweet *umeboshi* pickled plum paste and Kobai-eki syrup (the liquid produced while pickling the plums) have been favorites since the Edo era (1603–1868), and are still made in the same old-fashioned earthen-walled storehouse. The Takano family still makes them the same way as when they ran an inn during the Edo era: as the story goes, this shop got its start making these treats from *ume* plums for inn guests.

Souvenirs from Imajo-Shuku

Imajō Station Is Perfect for Souvenir Shopping!

The souvenir shop at Imajō Station offers a great selection of everything from local sake to popular sweets.

Hours:
9:00 to 17:00

A Standard among Souvenirs

Semi-Fresh Soba Noodles Made with Buckwheat from Imajo

Enjoy the flavor of Imajo *soba* noodles at home. The stone-ground buckwheat flour gives these noodles their delicious flavor and aroma.

Imajo Sobakko

A Sweet New Treat from Imajo

Japanese-style sweets made with aromatic Imajo buckwheat.

A Deliciously Sophisticated Dessert for Adults

Smoked Dried Persimmon Chocolates

Smoked dried persimmons are combined with cocoa and liquor for a grown-up treat. Awarded the highest honors by the ninth Fukui Prefectural Excellent Tourism Souvenir Product Review Board.

Local Sweets Made with Local Sake

Kura no Castella

Based on an idea from local junior school students, this moist, tender castella cake is soaked with syrup made with local sake from Imajo.



Imajo Soba Festival

at Imajo 365 Ski Resort

Each year, some twenty local *soba* noodle shops gather here to show off their specialties. Visitors can enjoy comparing the rustic flavors of each shop's Imajo *soba* noodles.



Kaido Roman Imajo-Shuku Festival

throughout Imajo-shuku

The entire kilometer-long stretch of road is closed off to vehicles, making it a great place to walk around and enjoy Imajo *soba* noodles, local sake, and more, or watch the Haneso-Odori dance!



Shuku no Ichi Market

at Showa Kaikan

These fun regularly-scheduled markets offer a chance to buy local vegetables or prepared foods, or to try making crafts.

4th Sun. in May

Sep.



日本遺産



Ukonke Museum (Kitamaebune Archives Center)

The Ukon Family Was One of the Five Biggest Shipowners on the Sea of Japan

From the late Edo era (1603–1868) to the middle of the Meiji era (1868–1912), the Kitamaebune trading ships played a huge role in transporting both goods and culture over the Sea of Japan and the Seto Inland Sea, and in the Osaka region. This museum is dedicated to these ships. In addition, Kono Kitamae Senshu Dori Street runs north of the Ukonke Museum, and there you'll find the old residences of shipowners and sailors, offering a glimpse at the days when the Kitamaebune trading ships were in their prime. In 2017, these received Japan Heritage certification, as the "Kitamaebune Port of Call & Shipowner Village."

Hours 9:00 to 16:00
Closed Wednesdays and new year holidays (Dec. 29 to Jan. 3)
Admission Adults (ages 15 and up) ¥500 (¥450 each for groups)
Children (ages 6–14) ¥300 (¥270 each for groups)



25-minute drive from Imajo-shuku

Hanahasu Park

Minami-Echizen: The Town of Lotus Flowers

Minami-Echizen Town has more land area dedicated to growing lotus flowers than anywhere else in Japan. Hanahasu Park features some 130 varieties of lotus flowers from around the world, and the flowers blossom in July and August, creating magical scenery for visitors to enjoy.

The adjacent Hanahasu Onsen Somayama offers overnight accommodations and relaxing baths, even for non-overnight guests.



Best Time to Visit!

Lotus Festival

Drink a beverage through a lotus stem "straw," try lotus dyeing, take part in a lotus flower photo shoot, and more! Lots of fun lotus flower-themed events.

Jul. Aug.



15-minute drive from Imajo-shuku



Former Hokuriku Main Line Tunnels

Railroad Tunnels from the Meiji Era

These railroad tunnels were once used to connect Minami-Echizen Town to Tsuruga City. Twelve tunnels were constructed to make it through the most difficult area of the Hokuriku region - the mountain pass between Imajo and Tsuruga - and ten of them still remain today. Pass through these dark, narrow tunnels and you'll have a better appreciation of what rail travel was like long ago, back when these were built. In more recent years, these have come to be appreciated as a valuable part of Japan's modernization, and the Japan Society of Civil Engineers has awarded these tunnels Civil Engineering Heritage recognition. They have also been nationally registered as Tangible Cultural Properties.



10-minute drive from Imajo-shuku



Kinome Pass

Dividing Fukui Prefecture into North and South

After the Hokurikudo Route was first established in the year 830, many famous figures from history traveled through this mountain pass.



30-minute drive from Imajo-shuku



Itadori-no-Shuku Post Town

The Entrance to Echizen Province

This post town featured a *sekisho* checkpoint during the Edo era (1603–1868). Even today, there are still four thatched-roof houses here, all well over a century old.



15-minute drive from Imajo-shuku



Imajo Soba Dojo

The Perfect Place to Make and Eat Imajo Soba Noodles

Fun for kids and adults alike! Make your own authentic *soba* noodles from stone-ground buckwheat flour, grated *yamaimo* yam, and spring water.



5-minute drive from Imajo-shuku



Imajo 365 Ski Resort

A Ski Resort with Hot Spring Baths

Fukui's nearest ski resort to the Kansai area. Enjoy breathtaking mountaintop views of the Sea of Japan and the Hakusan mountain range, and relax at the resort's hot spring baths and overnight accommodations.



15-minute drive from Imajo-shuku

