



河野の小路を  
追想にふける

# A guide to strolling along Kono Kitamae-Senshu street

Minamiechizen Town





## Kono Kitamae Sensyu Street outline

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In Kono in Minami-Echizen town, where the people would make their livelihood mostly by seafaring business in the old days, unique landscapes and architectural styles of the houses of captains, sailors, and the grand mansions of ship owners of the Kitamae-bunes, most notably, of the Ukon-ke or the Nakamura-ke are still well preserved, showing the magnitude of their prosperity of bygone days. The shoreline had been filled in order to widen and improve a village path into a major road, which is the current National Highway Route 305. Behind from Route 305, there is a narrow backstreet which used to be Kono's main street before Route 305 had been constructed. The old backstreet, lined with mansions and warehouses on both sides, has been renovated and is now called "Kono Kitamae Senshu (ship owner) Street", where people can take a stroll enjoying the history and atmosphere.

The Ukon-ke was once one of five leading owners of the Kitamae-bunes along the Sea of Japan. The residence of the Ukon family has been revived as the museum, "Kitamae-Senshu-no Yakata, Ukon-ke". When Yasutaro Ukon, the 12th head of the Ukon family of the old Kono village, left the maintenance of the mansion under the management of the village, they decided to make the mansion into a museum. The museum was made open in May, 1991, to show the architecture and exhibit documents and materials regarding the seafaring business of the House. It is made of up the main residence and warehouses built in the Meiji Era and a European-style mansion built in the early Showa period.

In addition, the residence of the Nakamura-ke was designated as an important cultural property of the country in July, 2015. The Japanese style architecture still maintains the good condition after century-long years from the time of its construction, showing the rich traditional inheritance of up to the pre-modern Japan. At the same time, the family adopted modern formats and artistic styles gradually. On top of that, a large number of old documents were found, making a major contribution to studying the process of adding or rebuilding the mansion. As a result, its historical value was recognized highly.

Welcome to the land of history and wonder. Allow us to take you to an intellectual journey to the Kono coast surrounded by quintessential views formed by the climate and the people who live there.

## About a building of the Ukon-ke

An old village path runs through the premises of the Ukon-ke (the House of Ukon). The main residence and three uchigras (in-house warehouses) are built on the mountain side from the path and four sotogras (outside warehouses) are on the ocean side.



The main residence was built in 1901 (Meiji 34), by expanding the former dwelling. It's a two-story hirairi house with a gabled, tiled roof. They employed Echizen tiles for the roofs and round-shaped tiles with the characters of Ukon carved in relief are placed at the end of the ridges. It's a gorgeous house with thick pillars of Japanese zelkova or hemlock wood, hiramono made of pine wood reportedly imported from the United States, and grayish lacquer-coated floor frames.

The two-storied godowns are built mainly with zelkova wood. In between the three sotogras on the south side and one sotogra on the north side, there is a plastered nagaya-mon gate, which is open towards the sea.

In a Japanese-style garden, created against the background of the hillside in the north of the main residence, there is a tea room.

"The European-style mansion of the old Ukon-ke", the cottage located on the higher ground behind the main residence, is designated as the registered tangible cultural asset of the country. It is a two-storied house of reinforced concrete designed and constructed in 1935 by Obayashi Corporation. Roofed with brownish Spanish tiles, the Spanish architectural style is adopted for the first floor while the second floor has verandas and takes on a chalet-like appearance with Japanese cypress logs piled similar to the Azekura style. The interior is semi-European with bedrooms and a hall equipped with a fire place called the Inglenook are on the first floor along with the kitchen, dressing rooms, bathrooms, and toilets, while a ten-tatami room with a four-tatami front room is arranged on the second floor.

**Kitamae Senshu-no Yakata,  
Ukon-Ke**

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Nanjo-gun, Fukui Pref, Japan  
TEL: +81 0778-48-2196

information



**Business Hours: 9:00 – 16:00**

**Closed on: Wednesdays, New Year Holidays (December 29 to January 3)**

**Admission: Adults (including university, high school students): 500 yen, Groups: 450 yen  
Children (junior high school students and younger): 300 yen, Groups: 270 yen  
\*A group means a party of 20 people or more.**

### Ukon-ke outline

Ukon-ke (the House of Ukon) was set up in 1680 (Enpo 8), in the early days of the Edo period, as Gonzaemon Ukon, the founder of the House, became independent when the Konso-ji, the family temple, had transferred some of its land, a house, and a ship to him.

“The Eternal Shop Wholesale Book” , the ledger of the Ukon-ke reveals that the family, while actively engaged in the business of “Nidoko-bune” (cargo boat) for the Omi merchants initially, they gradually shifted the bulk of their business from Nidoko-bune to Kitamae-bune, in which they themselves stocked products in their ships at ports and sold them at some other ports, during the periods of Tenmei through Kansei. The business of the Kitamae-bune, where ship owners bought and sold merchandises on their own judgment using their ships, constantly entailed some risk. Sometimes they had to endure profit loss due to the price fluctuation or at other times they lost cargos, or worse, their ship in a storm. Ukon-ke survived such plights bravely, waiting for a big break. The breakthrough came when the ninth Gonzaemon was the head of the family.

At age seventeen, he started to work as Captain of family ships, including the Sho-shinzo and the Yahata-maru, and learned the know-how of ship management, the operation of the Kitamae-bune, the knack of gathering information at ports, and so on. His experience at sea was the driving force with which Ukon-ke prevailed by seizing good business chances through the heyday of the Kitamae-bune from the final days of the Tokugawa shogunate to the early stage of the Meiji period, catapulting the House into one of the most powerful owners of Kitamae-bunes along the coast of the Sea of Japan. By the time of the last days of the Tokugawa shogunate, the family had eleven Kitamae-bunes, with the profit of 12,000 Ryo. Ukon-ke was counted in one of the five leading ship owners in the Sea of Japan.

The tenth Gonzaemon was actively engaged in the Kitamae-bune business, just like his father. By 1879 (Meiji 12), the House owned seventeen Kitamae-bunes, with the gross deadweight tonnage worth more than 18,000 Koku. It was such a spectacular sight to see a fleet of their seventeen Kitamae-bunes loaded with full of goods. However, the country was in flux, undergoing a rapid process of modernization. New technologies such as the telegraphic communication were being introduced. Realizing that the conventional shipping business would eventually be on the wane, the tenth Gonzaemon built the Ukon Warehouse in Otaru, Hokkaido, then started up Ukon Commercial Company Ltd., in Osaka. Based in Osaka and Otaru, he replaced his ships with western sailing ships, then again with steam ships later so that he could turn the business by handling the larger quantity of merchandise for the higher profit throughout the 20's of the Meiji period. When the Russo-Japanese war was brought to an end in 1905, the House of Ukon possessed seven steam ships with the gross tonnage exceeding 20,000 tons. The House clearly demonstrated that they had successfully transformed the family business into a new, modern enterprise.

Meanwhile, the tenth Gonzaemon played a pivotal role in preventing central powerhouses on the Pacific Coast, most notably, Nippon Yusen K.K., from making inroads into Hokkaido by forming the Hokuriku Partnership Committee with owners of Kitamae-bunes in Kaga and Echchu regions (Ishikawa and Toyama Prefectures). Furthermore, he foresaw the need for a marine insurance company managed jointly by the Kitamae-bune owners and took initiative in establishing Japan Maritime Insurance Co., Ltd. (the current Sampo Japan Nippon Koa Insurance Inc.), as the leader of the ship owners of the Kitamae-bune.





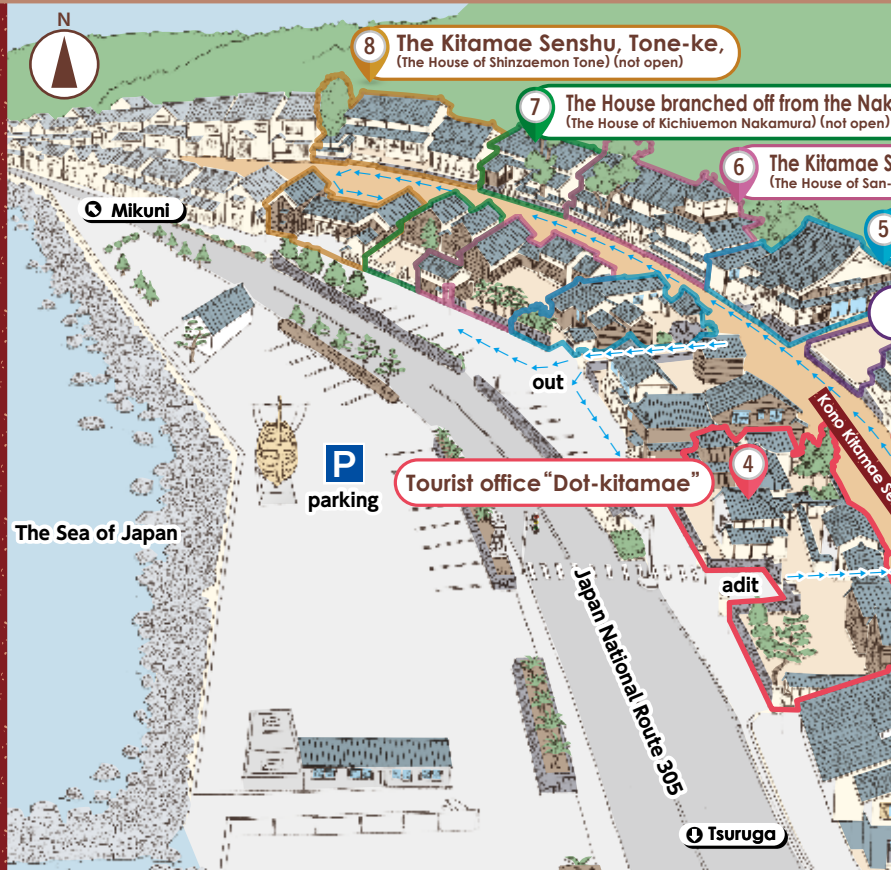
## Geography and history in kono

Located on the south end of the Echizen Coast, at the threshold of the Tsuruga Bay, Kono in Minami Echizen town had been prosperous from the old days as a relaying spot connecting Fuchu (current Echizen city) and Tsuruga by land and sea. At the port of Tsuruga, there were many ships co-chartered by the Omi merchants, which carried products from Hokkaido in the latter half of the 17th Century. Against such geographical backdrop, the villagers from Kono who had been working as seamen between Kono and Tsuruga began to own a Nidoko-bune (cargo boat) by themselves or work as the captain of a Nidoko-bune for the Omi merchants, based in Tsuruga port.

In the latter half of the Edo period, the marine transportation along the Sea of Japan made gigantic strides as the marketing and distribution systems expanded remarkably. Ship owners who used to earn wages by the volume of cargos loaded on their ships gradually started to stock merchandises at some ports and sell them at other ports. By taking advantage of the difference in commodity prices from one place to another, and thanks to the rising demand for the herring manure, the business of the Kitamae-bune grew significantly. Grasping opportunities, the ship owners ventured out into the open seas. Furthermore, the Kitamae-bunes were heavily involved in carrying daily supplies to the people who had settled on Hokkaido after the Meiji Restoration. The Kitamae-bune played the vital role in the formation of modern Japan. In this way, some of the most powerful owners of Kitamae-bune ships that sailed along the Sea of Japan had been produced from Kono in the final days of Tokugawa shogunate through the Meiji period.



# A guide to strolling along Kono Kitamae-Senshu street



## 1 History and Culture Fureai (Friendship) Hall

Documents and materials of the local people, their history, business, culture, etc. which were deeply associated with the sea are displayed and preserved in the Hall. The Kitamae-bune/Maritime Document Room is set up in the Library on the second floor, where classical writings and documents regarding the history of villages and towns along the coasts of the Sea of Japan and the Inland Sea, the documents of the Ukon-ke's ships and the Western Highway are collectively exhibited.

## 2 Kitamae Senshu-no Yakata, Ukon-ke

The prestigious Ukon-ke (the House of Ukon) is one of the five leading ship owners along the Sea of Japan. The mansion is now open to public as the Kitamae-bune Archives.



## 3 The European-style mansion of the old Ukon-ke

You can enjoy spectacular views of the Sea of Japan and the villages from the Mansion. Weather permitting, it's possible to see as far as Cape Kyoga of the Tango Peninsula. There is also a three-dimensional garden in the back of the Mansion, stretching from the hillside up to the mountain top.

## 4 Tourist office "Dot-kitamae"

The Ukon-ke's separated house was built in the early Taisho period as a new home for the eleventh head of the family and his wife. The house is currently used by the Kono Tourism Association and tourist information is available to visitors. Garden is also a point of interest.

Nakamura-ke,

Senshu, Nakamura-ke,  
San-jo Nakamura) (not open)

The Shinshu Otani-sect, Konsoji Temple  
(not open)

The remaining site of  
captain's house

The European-style mansion of  
the old Ukon-ke

3

2 Kitamae Senshu-no Yakata,  
Ukon-ke

#### Route

- The Ukon-ke premises
- The Konsoji premises
- The Nakamura-ke premises
- The premises of the house  
branched off from the  
Nakamura-ke
- The Tone-ke premises

Please do not walk through the  
Nagaya-mon gate of the Tones.  
Please follow the blue signs for  
going back to the parking lot.

Kono Kitamae-Senshu Street is found on a narrow ground at the foot of the cliff on the fault coastal terrain where the fault scarp is falling into the sea, with houses lined like a strip along the shoreline.

One conspicuous characteristic of the Street is the arrangement of the buildings on the premises of the ship owners. In Kono, the ship owners would build godowns on the sea side of the Street in their efforts to block the wind from the sea, while building the main residence on the mountain side of the Street.

With respect to the individual main residences of the ship owners, one can find a lot of common features among them. For instance, in awe of the sea, they created a gate open towards it. The layout of the front entrance, irori (the fireplace in the kitchen), Japanese rooms, and tall ilex trees planted in the front garden are some of the marked features commonly seen in and around their houses. In addition, they employed products from distant places for construction materials, such as the granite from the Inland Sea or famous fine trees native in particular areas. The sturdy and splendid houses filled with exquisite designs are incomparably impressive showing the power and the sophisticated tastes of the ship owners of the Kitamae-bunes. One feature that is easily recognizable from the Street is the patterns of roof tiles. One can also spot the wisdom of sailors in reusing the planks or cabin windows of the ships for their houses, which makes Kono Kitamae-Senshu Street even more interesting and fascinating.

Please keep out of the residential sites as some families do live in the houses.

1 History and Culture  
Fureai (Friendship) Hall

5 The Shinshu Otani-sect, Konsoji Temple  
(not open)

The Konsoji Temple, which had been deeply associated with the shipping business from the outset of the Edo period, was the family temple of many seamen in Kono-ura as well as the owners of Kitamae-bunes, most notably, the Ukon-ke and the Nakamura-ke. The temple eaves and the fine utensils placed for the majestic inner sanctuary were donated by the followers who had worked on the Kitamae-bunes.

6 The Kitamae Senshu, Nakamura-ke  
(the House of San-jo Nakamura) (not open)

The mansion of one of the most successful owners of the Kitamae-bunes in Hokuriku. The family's main residence, the shin-zashiki, and two godowns are built on the mountain side while the yakui-gate, which faces the seaside and opens towards the sea, is placed across from the facade of the main residence. Four godowns are built in row in the tsuma-iri form so as to protect the main residence from the wind from the sea.

The watchtower on the third floor of the shin-zashiki represents one major characteristic of the building, and was designated as the important cultural asset of the country.

7 The House branched off from the Nakamura-ke  
(the House of Kichiuemon Nakamura) (not open)

Kichiuemon Nakamura left the family of San-jo Nakamura to become independent during the Genroku period and started his own family. The family served as Manager of the Kono-ura area for generations but also worked as Captain for the Ukon-ke and the Nakamura-ke. It's a gabled tile-roofed, two-story hira-iri house. The main residence has a grand entrance on the platform constructed with piled shakudani stones, and there are three godowns on the sea side from the Street.

8 The Kitamae Senshu, Tone-ke  
(the House of Shinzaemon Tone) (not open)

The house was built in 1904 (Meiji 37). It's a gabled tile-roofed, two-story hira-iri house. The main residence has a grand entrance on the platform constructed with piled shakudani stones. A nagaya-mon gate and two godowns are built on the sea side across from the Street. As the families of the houses not open to public still live in them, we thank you in advance for taking kind consideration for their privacy while walking along the Street.

# Access to Kono information



## By railways

From Takefu Station of the JR Hokuriku Line or from Echizen Takefu Station of the Fukui Railways:  
About 40 min. by the Fukui Railways' Oushio/Kono route bus  
About 30 min. by taxi



## By cars

From Ishikawa/  
Fukui area, About 20 min. from Nanjo Smart IC of the Hokuriku Expressway,  
by National Highway Route 305  
About 30 min. from Takefu IC of the Hokuriku Expressway,  
take NH Route 8 southbound and Route 305 at the Sakurabashi intersection

## From Kansai/Chukyo area,

About 20 min. from Nanjo Smart IC of the Hokuriku Expressway,  
by NH Route 305 About 40 min. from Tsuruga IC of the Hokuriku Expressway,  
take NH Route 8 northbound, the Echizen-Kono Shiohaze Line, then Route 305

Inquiries

Industrial Promotion Section of Minami Echizen Town

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TEL: 0778-47-8002

Kono Tourism Association

☎915-1111 Kono 2-16, Minamiechizen-cho Nanjo-gun  
Fukui Pref. Japan  
TEL: 0778-48-2240

Minamiechizen-cho Tourist Information: <http://www.minamiechizen.com/>

