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TRAVEL guidebook

NAGAHAMA
TSURUGA
MINAMIECHIZEN

Travel to Photogenic
Japanese Heritage Sites

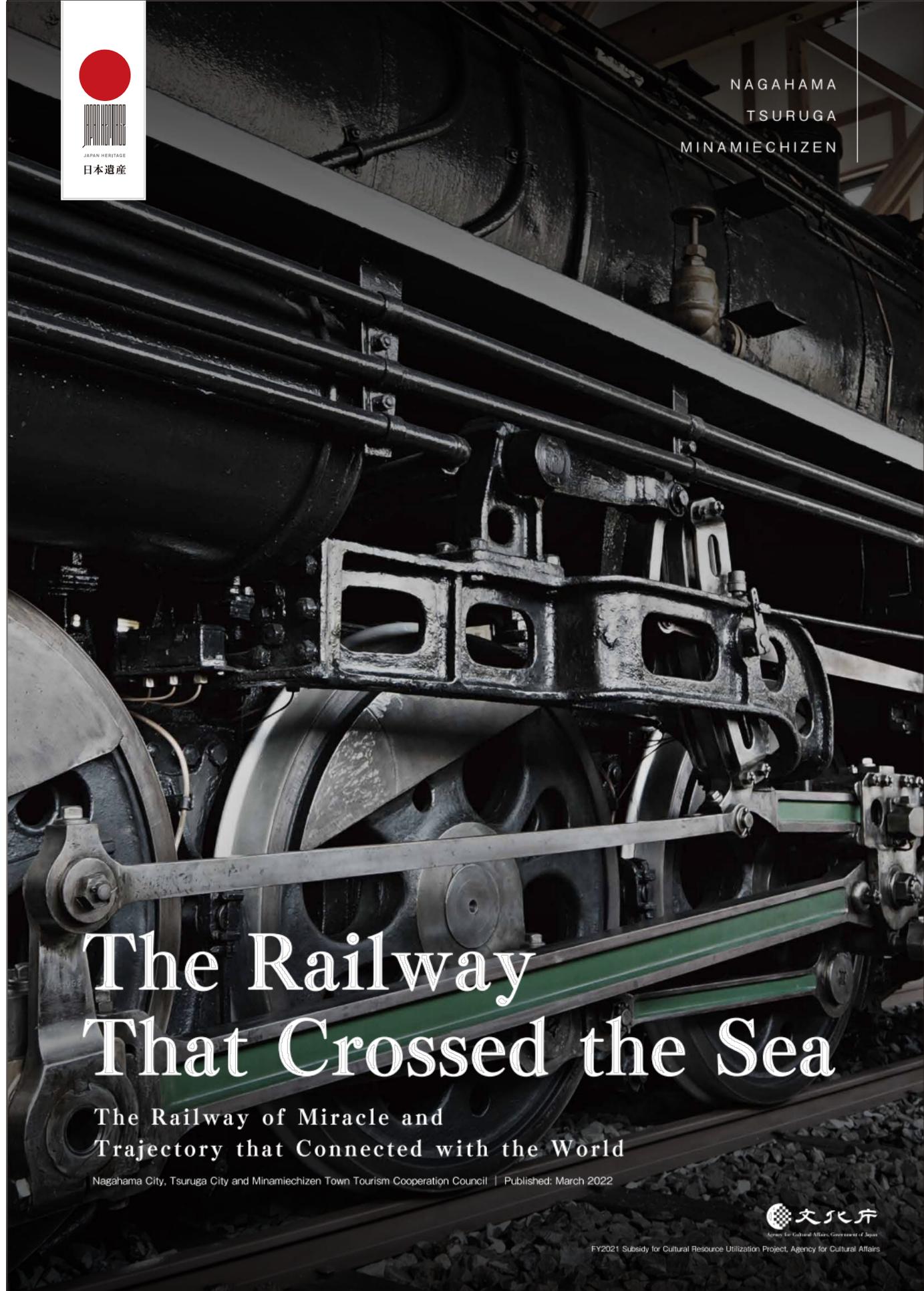


Go See the Treasures of Japan



日本遺産

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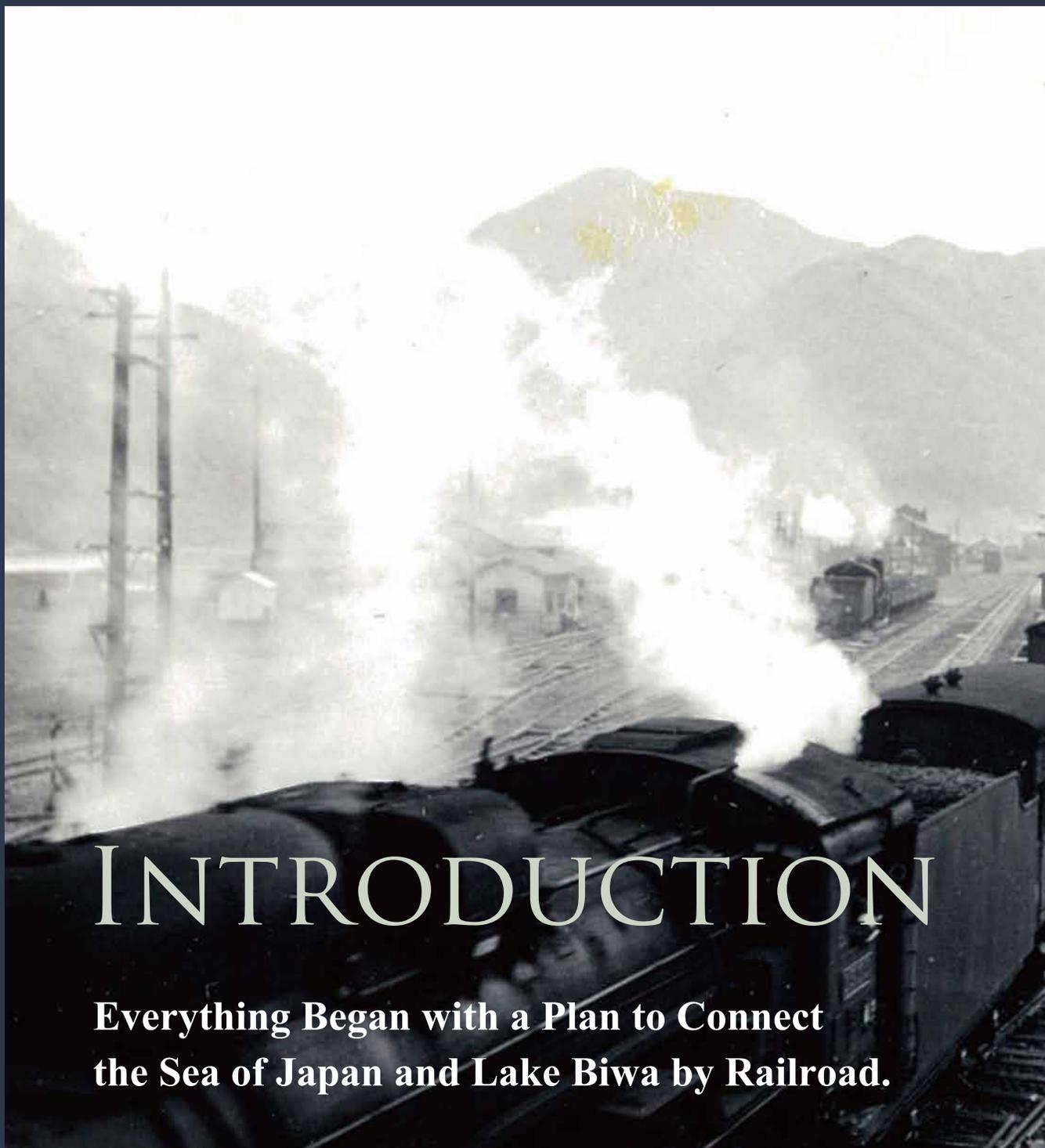
The Railway That Crossed the Sea

The Railway of Miracle and
Trajectory that Connected with the World

Nagahama City, Tsuruga City and Minamiechizen Town Tourism Cooperation Council | Published: March 2022



FY2021 Subsidy for Cultural Resource Utilization Project, Agency for Cultural Affairs



INTRODUCTION

Everything Began with a Plan to Connect the Sea of Japan and Lake Biwa by Railroad.

In the late 19th century, Japan took its first steps toward modernization. Railroads symbolized the development of civilizations, transporting people to a new era. The line connecting Nagahama, Tsuruga, and Imajo was one of the first important lines to be built. It is a treasure trove of railroad heritage, telling the story of the dawn of Japanese railways. This heritage lives on to this day — join us on a journey through a century of memories.

The Railroad Heritage Corridor Linking Fukui and Shiga

For centuries, Nagahama City, Shiga Prefecture; Tsuruga City, Fukui Prefecture; and Imajo in Minamiiechizen Town, Fukui Prefecture prospered as key transportation hubs. Nagahama served as a terminal for water and land transportation, connecting the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean. In Tsuruga, railroads and ports connected land and sea transportation. Imajo served as a base for railroads that passed through the mountains. As Japan modernized in the late 19th and early 20th century, key railroad routes connected these three places, and they helped support Japan's cultural and economic development.

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STORY 1

The Train Whistle of Modernization: From Nagahama to Tsuruga and Imajo

Building the Most Important Route Connecting the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean

Japan's first railroad plan, drafted in 1869, aimed to connect the major cities in eastern and western Japan with the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean. In addition to the main Tokyo–Kyoto line, there were three branch lines: Tokyo–Yokohama, Kyoto–Kobe, and Tsuruga–Lake Biwa. For centuries, goods from the Sea of Japan had to be transported by land from Tsuruga to Kyoto and Osaka, via Lake Biwa, but this route had to pass through the mountains. For 800 years, people had dreamed of a way to deal with these difficult mountain passes—and now, with the railroad, this route was finally practical.

The Nagahama–Tsuruga Route Opens, Connecting the Sea of Japan with Inland Areas

Emperor Meiji's government aimed to build a transportation network that connected the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean. This network used Tsuruga, a city on the Sea of Japan coast, as a hub between Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, and Nagoya, using the railroad to connect them with cities and towns on the coast of Lake Biwa, as well as the countries on the other side of the Sea of Japan. At the suggestion of Inoue Masaru, then-Director General of the Railway Bureau, Nagahama was chosen as the base for transportation on the lake, due to its prosperity as a transit point for goods from the North region of Japan, and its willingness to serve as a railroad hub. In 1882, just ten years after Japan's first railroad opened, the Nagahama–Tsuruga line began operation. Two years later, the Yanagase Tunnel opened, marking the start of the Hokuriku Line's history.

Extending the Hokuriku Line to Transport Goods to and from the Sea of Japan

In 1892, Extension construction to Toyama of the Hokuriku Line began, based on a plan for state-run railroad lines. The route connecting Tsuruga and Imajo was particularly important, but the steep hills along the way pushed the limits of the railroad technology of the era. Workers overcame many difficulties to extend the Hokuriku Line, section by section, and the Tsuruga–Fukui route opened in 1896.

Railroads in Operation in 1882

The plan was to connect shipping on the Sea of Japan, which had flourished in the centuries before, with railroad transportation.



Inoue Masaru

Inoue was instrumental in Japan's modernization, by promoting the construction of railroads. He was known as the "Father of the Railway."

From the Biography of Inoue Masaru



Steam Locomotive on Steep Hill

(Between Tsuruga and Imajo)

Overcoming the Challenges of Railway Construction

Japanese Railroads Built by Japanese People: Taking on the Challenge of Building Tunnels

Initially, Japanese railroads were built under the guidance of foreign engineers, but as Director General of the Railway Bureau, Inoue Masaru's goal was railroads built by Japanese engineers on their own. Working with foreign engineers, Inoue established a training institute for railroad engineers, and the Japanese technicians who were trained at the institute went to work on the construction project. In 1880, the Osakayama Tunnel between Kyoto and Otsu was completed — a project handled entirely by Japanese workers.

Building on this experience, the Nagahama–Tsuruga railroad began construction that same year, and was completed by Japanese workers alone. The 1,352-meter Yanagase Tunnel, the longest tunnel in Japan at the time, was also completed successfully, as another step toward Japan's modernization through the adoption of foreign technology and know-how.

Overcoming Challenges

Crossing through Yanagase

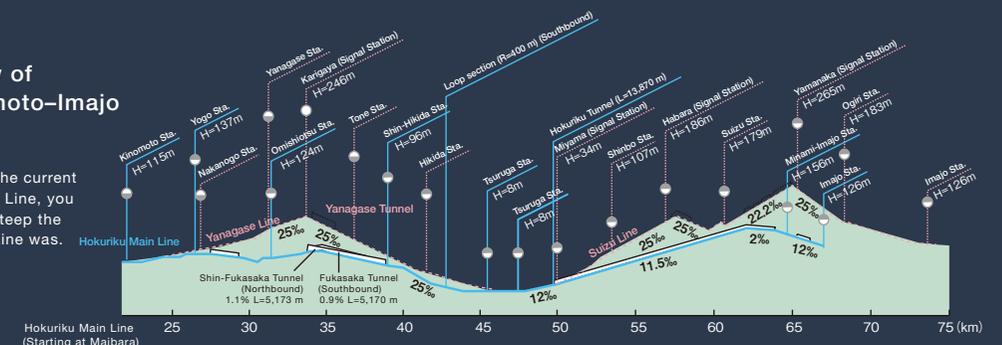
On the route between Nagahama and Tsuruga, four tunnels were dug between Yanagase and Tone alone. The construction of the Yanagase tunnel was difficult, due to the soft soil and the many water springs. This marked the first time dynamite was used in Japan, but rock drills did not work well for this task. As a result, much of the work had to be done by hand, using pickaxes and chisels. Two years after the partial opening of the Nagahama–Tsuruga line, the tunnels were finally completed.

Crossing through Yamanaka Pass

The route between Tsuruga and Imajo was particularly difficult. It required twelve tunnels, including the 1,170-meter-long Yamanaka Tunnel, through a steep mountainous area with a 2.5% grade — the limit of railroad technology at the time. The rock was so hard in some places that a full day's work would only make 15 cm of progress, and construction was repeatedly halted due to flooding. This extremely challenging project was completed in 1896, after three years of hard work.

Side View of the Kinomoto–Imajo Route

Compared to the current Hokuriku Main Line, you can see how steep the old Hokuriku Line was.



History of Railroad Construction

Nagahama–Tsuruga–Imajo

- 1869 Construction ordered for the Tokyo–Yokohama, Kyoto–Kobe, and Tsuruga–Lake Biwa railroads
- 1872 Opening of the Shinbashi–Yokohama railroad
- 1877 The Kyoto–Kobe railroad is fully opened
- 1880 Construction begins on the Nagahama–Tsuruga railroad / Opening of the Kyoto–Otsu railroad
- 1880 Construction begins on the Nagahama–Tsuruga railroad / Opening of the Kyoto–Otsu railroad
- 1882 Opening of the Nagahama–Kanegasaki (Tsuruga) railroad (except the Yanagase Tunnel)
- 1884 Completion of the Yanagase Tunnel; the Tsuruga Line, between Nagahama and Kanegasaki (Tsuruga), is fully opened
Japan's first railroad ferry (Nagahama–Otsu) begins operation
- 1889 The Tokaido Line (Shimbashi–Kobe) is fully opened / Railroad ferry services are discontinued
- 1892 The Railway Construction Law is announced to the public (the Hokuriku Line between Tsuruga and Toyama was designated for construction in the first phase)
- 1896 Opening of the Tsuruga–Fukui railroad
- 1899 Tsuruga Port is designated as an open port (port for international trade)
- 1902 Start of regular ferry services between Tsuruga and Vladivostok
Nagahama Station moves to its present location (with a new station building)
- 1909 Tsuruga Station moves to its present location (with a new station building)
- 1912 Start of Europe–Asia international train service between Shimbashi and Kanegasaki, connecting to Vladivostok
- 1913 Hokuriku Main Line is fully opened between Maibara and Naetsu
- 1957 Construction of Hokuriku Tunnel begins; Fukasaka Tunnel opens
The Tamura–Tsuruga line is AC-electrified (the former line remains as the Yanagase Line)
- 1958 The former Nagahama Station building is designated the first Railway Monument
- 1962 Opening of the Hokuriku Tunnel; the Tsuruga–Fukui route is fully electrified (the former line between Tsuruga and Imajo, through Yamanaka Pass, is closed)
- 1964 The Yanagase line is closed
- 1983 The former Nagahama Station building is reopened as a railroad museum
- 1987 The Japanese National Railways are privatized
- 2016 The tunnels of the former Hokuriku Line, between Tsuruga and Imajo, are nationally registered as Tangible Cultural Properties
- 2020 This story of railroad heritage, across three communities, is recognized as a Japan Heritage Site

STORY 2

The Opening of the Railway and Urban Prosperity

Nagahama's Transformation into a Railroad Terminal, Developing Industry and Culture

In 1882, the railroad line between Nagahama and Tsuruga was opened, and two years later the line was extended to Ogaki, making Nagahama Station a major terminal connecting Tsuruga to the north, Ogaki to the east, and Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe via railroad ferry service. Nagahama Station was located next to the port and cargo warehouses of the railroad ferries. There were many stores in the surrounding area, including forwarding agencies, and brokerage businesses that loaded and unloaded cargo. At the time, many people would come to watch and ride the steam trains.



The Former Nagahama Station (circa 1897)



Changes in the Railroad Lines between Nagahama and Sekigahara

The Nagahama–Fukatani line stopped operation in 1889, and was later closed.

Tsuruga and Imajo, Busy Railroad Stations for Steep Mountain Passes

Trains would stop at Tsuruga and Imajo Stations to refuel, and to connect or disconnect additional locomotive engines that would push trains from behind, in order to make it through steep, mountainous areas. Vendors began to take advantage of this, selling items like newspapers to waiting passengers; this also led to the popularity of boxed meals like the sea bream sushi sold at Tsuruga Station, as well as the Imajo soba noodles sold by a stand that opened on the platform of Imajo Station in 1930. As more and more people traveled during the 20th century, these stations became even busier, with many locomotives, facilities, and staff members at both.



Imajo-shuku (circa 1930)
Courtesy of Imajo Hatago Juku (NPO)

The Hokkoku Kaido Route: A Land Route Connecting People and Culture

Many of Japan's railroad lines are based on the land routes developed by the Shogunate government during the Edo era (1603–1868). Post towns established along these routes were involved in the spread of people, goods, and information, and formed their own unique cultures and landscapes.

The area along the former Hokuriku Line includes Imajo-shuku, which prospered as one of the finest post towns in modern-day Fukui Prefecture; Kinomoto-juku, along the route to Kinomoto Jizoin Temple, one of Japan's three great Jizo temples; and Nagahama-juku, which still retains the atmosphere of a port town.



D51-Class Steam Locomotive (Imajo Station)

Japan's first smoke collector, to prevent smoke from the steam locomotive chimney from entering the cabin, was developed at the Tsuruga engine depot.

The Steam Locomotives and People That Crossed Mountain Passes

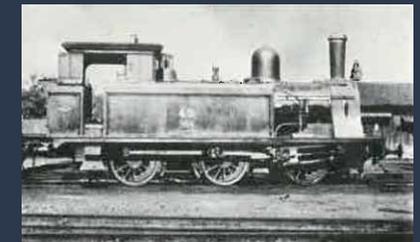
Using Steam Locomotives for Steep Routes

The section between Nagahama and Tsuruga (through Yanagase) and the section between Tsuruga and Imajo (through Yamanaka) required powerful steam locomotives to make it up the steep hills. When the line was opened, specially-made steam locomotives from England were used between Nagahama and Tsuruga. In the 20th century, the first two D51-class steam locomotives (the most-manufactured locomotives in Japanese National Railways history) were deployed to the Tsuruga engine depot, which was located between two sections that were difficult to travel through. These locomotives were sized to fit through the Kotone Tunnel, and became the key to crossing through these mountain passes.

The Difficult Tunnels of Japan's Most Challenging Section of Railway

In the series of tunnels through Nagahama, Tsuruga and Imajo, the smoke from the steam locomotives was so thick that passengers' faces would turn black with soot. In summer, the inside of the locomotive could reach 70–80°C, so the train crew would cover their faces with hand towels soaked in water as they walked through.

This section of the railway had steep hills and tunnels, and a high risk of avalanches in winter, earning it the title of "Japan's most challenging section of railroad section." Because of these unpleasant conditions, crew members were paid extra to work along this section of the railway, based on how bad the smoke would get in their train car.



1800-Class Steam Locomotive

From *One Hundred Years of the Japanese National Railways: A Photographic History*

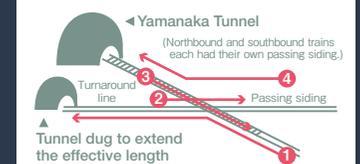
Manufactured in the UK by Kitson, for use on sloped lines. This locomotive was used between Nagahama and Tsuruga and Sekigahara, and between Kyoto and Otsu.

Switchbacks for Climbing Steep Slopes



This system, which combines a train turnaround line and a passing siding, was designed to climb steep sections, and was installed at three locations between Tsuruga and Imajo: Shinbo, Habara and Yamanaka.

Switchbacks at Yamanaka Signal Station



- 1 Enter the turnaround line from the main line
- 2 Back up to enter the passing siding (southbound)
- 3 Northbound train passes through the main line
- 4 Build speed and re-enter the main line, toward Yamanaka Tunnel

STORY 3

Great Changes to the Port, Brought by the Opening of the Railway

Connecting Japan and Europe through Europe-Asia International Train Service

Tsuruga Port prospered as a center of maritime trade, including the Kitamaebune trading ships. However, as the Hokuriku Line was extended to other places along the Sea of Japan coast, and railroads became the main way to transport goods, the port began to decline. Local business owners grew concerned about this situation, and campaigned to turn Tsuruga into an international port.

As a result, Tsuruga Port was designated as an international port in 1899. After that, when the Trans-Siberian Railway across Russia was fully opened, regular trips between Tsuruga and Vladivostok were established, making this the shortest route from Japan to Europe. In 1912, Europe-Asia international train service was opened between Shimbashi in Tokyo and Kanegasaki (Tsuruga Port), for direct travel to Europe via Vladivostok. Tsuruga Port became Japan's gateway to the world.



Steamer Ship at Kanegasaki Pier (circa 1930)

Tsuruga Port connected to places as far away as Paris, France. The city bustled with both foreign and Japanese travelers using the Europe-Asia international train service.

From the Tsuruga Municipal Museum Collection



Cruise Ship Entering Tsuruga Port

Even today, Tsuruga Port is an international port, where large foreign cruise ships and international cargo ships stop.

The Europe-Asia International Train



Route Map

The railroad connected Tsuruga to Europe across the sea — with a single ticket, travelers could go from Shimbashi in Tokyo to Paris.



Europe-Asia Connecting Ticket via Siberia

Routes shown include Tokyo to Berlin, via Tsuruga and Vladivostok.

The People Who Crossed the Sea of Japan from Tsuruga

The athletes of Japan's first Olympic delegation, including Kanakuri Shizo, traveled to Stockholm using this train service. Likewise, the poet Yosano Akiko took it to France. The explorer Roald Amundsen, who became the first person to reach the South Pole, also used this train to leave Japan.

Tsuruga, the "Port of Humanity," and the Story of "Visas for Life"

In 1940, during World War II, Sugihara Chiune served as vice-consul at the Japanese consulate in Lithuania; in order to save Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, he defied his orders from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo, and issued these refugees "Visas for Life." Tsuruga Port is also known as the "Port of Humanity," because it was the only port where the Jewish refugees saved by these visas came ashore.

The people of Tsuruga warmly welcomed these refugees by opening public baths to be used for free, and by giving the refugees apples and other fruits. Words of gratitude from these Jewish refugees are still preserved in Tsuruga.



Sugihara Chiune

In a single month, Sugihara issued 2,139 visas to Jewish people fleeing persecution, before leaving the consulate.

Diplomatic Record Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The End of the Old Hokuriku Line

With the completion of the Hokuriku Tunnel in 1962, the section through Yamanaka Pass between Tsuruga and Imajo was closed; then, in 1964, the Yanagase Line was also closed. The railroad heritage of those days, a reminder of the old Hokuriku Line, has been preserved unchanged as a cultural property closely connected to the community.



Opening of the Hokuriku Tunnel

The Hokuriku Tunnel was the longest in Japan at the time. When this tunnel opened, the section through Yamanaka Pass was closed.

Nagahama Port Japan's First Railroad Ferry



The Old Nagahama Port (1912)

The inner moat of Nagahama Castle, built by Hashiba Hideyoshi, was excavated and maintained next to Nagahama Station.

From the Photograph Collection to Commemorate 25 Years Since the Imperial Visit to the Kaijinkan

Nagahama Port has been a key shipping hub on Lake Biwa since the 16th century, when it was built by order of Hashiba Hideyoshi. In the 19th century, the local businessman Asami Matazo and others recognized the importance of railroads and transportation on the lake; with their help, Japan's first railroad ferry service began here in 1882. When the railroad between Otsu and Maibara opened in 1889, the railroad ferry service was discontinued. However, the lake transport service, which played an important traffic route in Japan, still operates in a different form today for tourists.

The Kitamaebune Trading Ships

Connecting Economies via the Sea



Passing Kitamaebune Trading Ships on the Sea of Japan

Old photograph from the Ida family collection, courtesy of the Wakasa History Museum

These shipping routes developed during the Edo era (1603–1868), and became a major economic trunk line connecting Hokkaido, Tohoku, Hokuriku, and western Japan. When Kitamaebune trading ships arrived at ports, they would sell goods brought in from other places, and pick up local goods to sell at other ports. These ships earned huge fortunes during the second half of the 19th century in particular, and contributed greatly to Japan's modernization.

RELATED HISTORY

JAPAN HERITAGE MAP

Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Properties

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6 Magaridani Tunnel (260m)

The tunnel is made of government-issued bricks, and the stones and bricks are more carefully stacked than in the other tunnels. Seeing through the Ashitani and Iradani tunnels, in a straight line from the tunnel exit, is one of the highlights.



14 Kashimagari Tunnel (87m)

The entrance and all the interior walls are made of bricks, with a special design. It is now used as a walkway along a national route. Inside, there is old-fashioned lantern-style lighting, for a closer look at the different brickwork on the side walls and arches.



15 Yanagase Tunnel (1352m)

When it was completed in 1884, after four years of work due to difficult conditions, it was the longest tunnel in Japan. This tunnel was constructed solely by Japanese engineers — a testament to the technical expertise that contributed to the development of Japan's rail network.



1 Yunoo Tunnel (368m)

Much like Kashimagari Tunnel, the entrance to the Tsuruga end, this tunnel has all-brick interior walls.



4 Iradani Tunnel (467m)

This tunnel was built with the same design as Kashimagari, Habara, and Yamanaka tunnels.



5 Ashitani Tunnel (223m)

This tunnel was built with carefully selected materials supplied by the government.



7 No. 2 Kannonji Tunnel (310m)

Inside the tunnel, you can see the remains of overhead communication lines and sockets, from when it was constructed.



8 No. 1 Kannonji Tunnel (82m)

This tunnel was constructed using low-cost local materials.



10 Sorojidani Tunnel (401m)

This tunnel features an erosion control dam above one entrance, and drainage channels to prevent flooding.



11 Funagaya Tunnel (64m)

This tunnel's entrances are made of stone. It is short and straight enough to see through to the other end.



12 Habara Tunnel (979m)

A tunnel that goes up and down inside, and contains the highest point of the area's slope.



2 Remains of Ogiri Station

The remains of the platform are still here, and a wheel from a steam locomotive is on display.



3 Remains of Yamanaka Signal Station

The only remaining switchback between Tsuruga and Imajo. It is a precious remnant of the railroad technology that was once used to travel through the mountain pass.



16 Remains of Nakanogo Station

A portion of the platform that served as the base station for traveling through Yanagase can still be seen today, in front of the Yogo branch office of the Nagahama city hall.



18 Former Nagahama Station Turnout Point No. 29

The oldest remaining turnout point in Japan, which was used for about 80 years after the opening of Nagahama Station. It was manufactured at the Kobe Factory of the Railway Bureau.



9 View of Suizu

One of the most beautiful spots on the Hokuriku Line. It is said to have been admired by Emperor Taisho from his train.



13 Habara Embankment

Known for its gentle curve, reminiscent of the scenery seen by train passengers in the past.

17 Plaques

These plaques by Ito Hirobumi and Kuroda Kiyotaka were displayed at major tunnels, as a sign that railroad construction was a central part of national policy. The original plaques are now on display at the Nagahama Railway Museum.



Yanagase Tunnel: "Bansei Eirai"



Tsuruga End of Habara Tunnel: "Yokoku Kankyu"



Imajo End of Habara Tunnel: "Eisei Mukyu"



Tsuruga End of Yamanaka Tunnel: "Ko Kauji"



Imajo End of Yamanaka Tunnel: "Tokusui Koei"



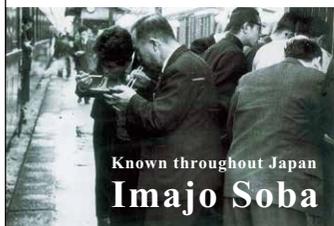


Walk along the Railroad Heritage



Every train stopped at Imajo Station before crossing through mountain passes, making Imajo a lively railroad town. Those days live on today, through parts of the old station that still remain, as well as the local food culture.

The Imajo soba noodle stand, originally built on the platform of Imajo Station in 1930, has long been a place for travelers to get a quick meal on their way to or from the Hokuriku region.



Known throughout Japan
Imajo Soba



Imajo Station Water Tower and Coal Supply Platform

Equipment Remains from the Era of Steam Locomotives

Imajo Station's old water tower and coal supply platform, which were used to refuel steam locomotives, can still be seen at the station, for a unique contrast to today's railroad.



At the top of the Yamanaka Rock Shed, there is still a structure to protect the signal station passing siding.

Pushing the Limits of Railroad Technology to Travel through Mountain Passes.

Difficult mountain passes stand between Tsuruga and Imajo. Cutting-edge technology of the time was used to build the old Hokuriku Line, from building the railroad to running the steam locomotives. Explore various railroad heritage sites, for a look at what life was like in the past.

Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property
Yamanaka Rock Shed

One of Japan's First Prestressed Concrete Structures

This structure, built in 1953, protected the railroad tracks from falling rocks and soil. It features an attractive form, with a series of columns that reflect its mechanical characteristics.



Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property
Yamanaka Tunnel

The Remains of Railroad Technology Used to Cross Steep Mountain Passes

This is the longest tunnel between Tsuruga and Imajo. The Imajo end still has the remains of a switchback that helped trains make their way up the steep slope.



Dead-End Tunnel (Next to Yamanaka Tunnel)

Back when the switchback was in use, it was extended by digging a tunnel to allow longer trains to use it, in order to increase train traffic. This tunnel is only open on one end, because it was used for changing direction.

Walking Around a Post Town

The townscape still has its old post town atmosphere.

During the Edo era (1603–1868), Imajo-shuku was one of the most prosperous post towns in modern-day Fukui Prefecture. A kilometer-long stretch of the town still has its old layout, almost completely unchanged, down to the width of the road. Even today, visitors can see buildings and local culture that tell stories of this post town's lively history.



Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property

Showa Kaikan

This old-fashioned building, over 90 years old, served as both a town hall and community center.

It was built in 1930, by the local businessman Tanaka Wakichi at Wakihonjin trace. The building's three-story reinforced concrete construction was rare at the time.



Takano Yoshihei Shoten

A family-run shop that has specialized in *ume* plum products for generations. Their specialties include sweetened mashed *ume* plum, and *ume* plum syrup.



A Kilometer-Long Stretch of an Old Post Town, Still Lively Today

Sake Breweries

Sake brewed in Imajo has been enjoyed by travelers for centuries. Today, there are four sake breweries along the road.



Bends in the Road

The road bends near the entrances to this post town, making it impossible to see very far down the road. This was meant as a defensive measure, to prevent sudden invasions by enemies.

Guidepost from the Bunsei Era (1818–1830)



Post Town Food

Imajo Dried Persimmons: A Source of Energy for Travelers

These dried persimmons are smoked — a rare technique in Japan. They were prized as a convenient food for travelers along the Hokkoku Kaido Route.



Chameshi "Tea Rice": A Local Classic Brought by Travelers

This dish is a must-have at any event in Imajo. It is said to be based on Nara *chameshi* "tea rice," brought here by travelers.



Municipally Designated Historic Site

Guidepost from the Bunsei Era (1818–1830)

A stone pillar guiding travelers along the Hokkoku Kaido Route.

It was built in 1830, the carvings on it read "Right : Road to Kyoto, Tsuruga, Wakasa" and "Left : Road to Kyoto, Ise, Edo"

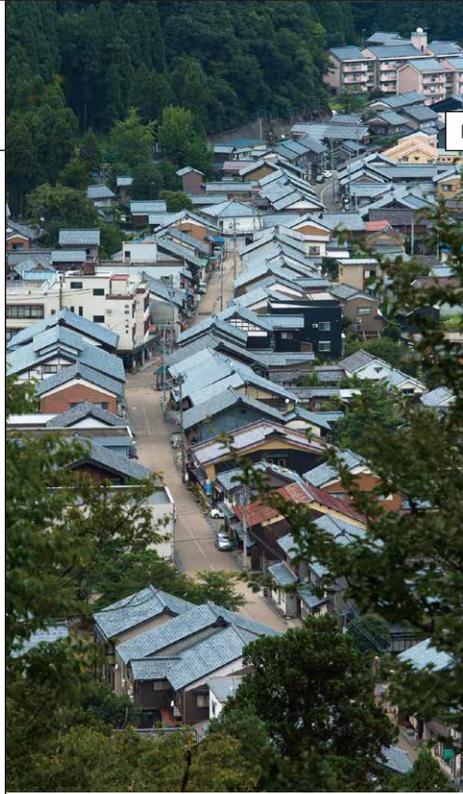


Prefecture-Designated Tangible Cultural Property

Former Residence of Kyoto Jingoro

A large machiya townhouse, scarred by the swords of the Mito Tengu Group.

This was the residence of one of the most prominent families in Imajo-shuku, and the Mito Tengu Group stayed here at the end of the Edo era (1603–1868). The roof features a firebreak wall called an *udatsu*, a sign of the family's wealth.



Imajo-shuku Historic Post Town



All Roads through the Mountain Passes Met in Imajo, Making It One of Fukui's Most Prosperous Post Towns

Imajo long served as a gateway to the land routes connecting the Hokuriku region with Kyoto and Edo (present-day Tokyo). During the Edo era (1603–1868), Imajo developed as a post town due to its valuable location as a transportation hub. The townscape still retains many signs of those prosperous days, such as the town's defense-oriented layout, and the accommodations for important travelers located in the center of town.



Walk Around Minamiechizen

From a Post Town on the Hokkoku Kaido Route to a Railroad Hub.

Encounter the sights seen by travelers centuries ago. During the Edo era (1603–1868), Imajo was one of the most prosperous post towns in the Hokuriku region. Later, in the Meiji era (1868–1912), it flourished as a railroad hub for people and goods crossing through the mountain passes. A walk around town makes the perfect way to explore the local history of travel, and the way it connected people and culture.



Haneso-Odori Dance

This dance is designated an intangible folk cultural property by Fukui Prefecture. It is performed in a variety of costumes, with dancers dressed as warriors, priests, or townspeople, and evokes the image of travelers dancing happily together.



Imajo Machinami Information Center

Your Starting Point for Visiting Imajo: Explore the Town's History and Culture

Learn all about the history of Imajo, which flourished as a post town and railroad hub. The displays here include a 1/45 scale model of the lively Imajo Station as it was around 1960, doll dioramas depicting events that occurred in Imajo-shuku, and video footage from the past.

Address: 74-3-1 Imajo, Minamiechizen Town, Nanjo District (inside Imajo Station)
Hours: 9:00 to 16:00
Closed: New Year holidays
Tel.: (0778) 45-0074

Walk along the Railroad Heritage



Starting in 1882, with the opening of the railway, trains carried passengers and freight between Tsuruga Station and the former Tsuruga Port Station, on these now-decommissioned tracks.

The Railroad That Crossed the Sea, Connecting Japan with the World.

Much of Tsuruga's remaining railroad heritage dates back to the early days of the railroad — a sign of just how important the railroad was. Pay a visit to the heritage sites for a sense of how Tsuruga became an even more important shipping hub as transportation of goods transitioned from the Kitamaebune trading ships to the railroad, connecting Tsuruga with the world.

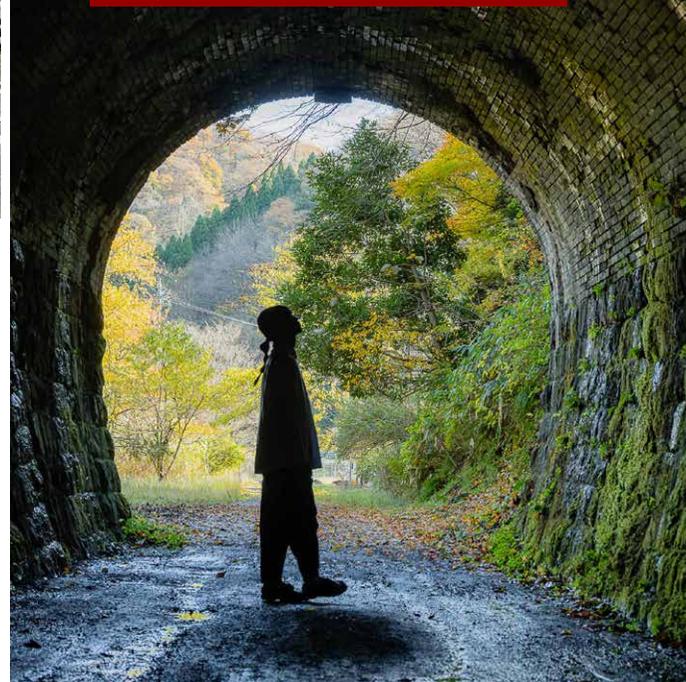
Tsuruga City-Designated Cultural Property

Kotone Tunnel

Japan's Oldest Remaining Railroad Tunnel.

This tunnel is unchanged from when it was completed in 1881. It was built to fit the standards of the late 19th century, so it is fairly small; just 6.2 m tall and 16.7 m long. The D51, Japan's most-produced steam locomotive, is said to have been designed to fit this tunnel.

See map on p. 9–10 for the tunnels of the former Hokuriku Line



Tsuruga Share Cycle

An Easy Way to Get Around Town

Look for the distinctive red e-bikes. Bikeshare users can take out or return bicycles at any of the Tsuruga Share Cycle bike ports around central Tsuruga.

Walk Around the Center of Town

Walk Around and Discover This Port Town's Prosperous History.

In Tsuruga, the port is near the center of town, making it a great place to explore on foot, or with a bikeshare bicycle. Enjoy the history of Tsuruga's prosperity through admiring its powerful architecture and enjoying its unique food culture.



Museum Street

Old-Fashioned Boxed Meals from the Station



Sea Bream Sushi

Pressed sushi made from sea bream caught in and around Tsuruga Bay. These boxed meals were originally sold at Tsuruga Station, while passengers waited for the additional engine to be added to or removed from their train.



Megane ("Glasses") Bridge

The Remains of a Late-19th-Century Railroad Bridge in Tsuruga

This bridge was built in 1881, so trains could cross the canal. Learn about where the railroad tracks once were, and about the railroad construction technology of the time.

Address: 2 Kanawa-cho, Tsuruga City



Tsuruga Railway Museum (Former Tsuruga Port Station)

Learn All About Tsuruga's Railways under a Distinctive Pointed Roof

This is a reproduction of the departure and arrival terminal for the Europe-Asia international train service between Japan and Europe. Inside the museum are materials related to Tsuruga's railroads.

Address: 1-25 Minato-machi, Tsuruga City
Hours: 9:00 to 17:00
Closed: Wed. (or following day if Wed. is a national holiday), New Year holidays
Tel.: (0770) 21-0056



Tsuruga City-Designated Cultural Property

Former Tsuruga Port Station Lamp House

One of Japan's Oldest Remaining Railroad Buildings

This warehouse once stored fuel for the lanterns used to light trains. The inside of the warehouse has been recreated, to show lamps and fuel being stored.

Address: 1-19 Kanegasaki-cho, Tsuruga City
Hours: 9:00 to 17:00
Closed: New Year holidays

The Food Culture of Tsuruga

"Scallop" A Tsuruga Yoroppa-ken Specialty

A Tsuruga Yoroppa-ken exclusive: a pork cutlet served with demiglace sauce. This dish's origins remain a mystery, but it has a fashionably Western-style feel, typical of Japanese port towns.



Oboro Shaved Kombu Kelp: Made Possible by the Kitamaebune Trade Ships

Kombu kelp was brought to Tsuruga from Hokkaido by the Kitamaebune trading ships. After being processed in Tsuruga, such as shaved into this iconic oboro, it was then shipped out to the Kansai region.



Kehi Jingu Shrine

The Main Shrine of the Old Hokuriku-do Region, with One of Japan's Largest Wooden Torii Gates

The shrine's magnificent Great Torii Gate is one of the three largest wooden torii gates in Japan, along with those at Kasuga Taisha Shrine and Itsukushima Shrine. The shrine grounds contain spots known for mystical power, such as the Chomeisui "water of long life" spring.

Address: 11-68 Akebono-cho, Tsuruga City
Hours: 5:00 to 17:00
(Opens at 6:00 Oct. to Mar.)
Tel.: (0770) 22-0794



Nationally-Designated Important Cultural Property

Former Owada Bank Headquarters Building

Modern Architecture Tells the Story of the Port Town of Tsuruga

This bank was built in 1927 by Kitamaebune trading ship owner Owada Shoshichi, and the father of Tsuruga's modernization. The building is now used for the Tsuruga Municipal Museum, and contains a variety of exhibits.

Address: 7-8 Aioi-cho, Tsuruga City
Hours: 10:00 to 17:00
Closed: Mon. (or following day if Mon. is a national holiday), New Year holidays
Tel.: (0770) 25-7033



Port of Humanity Tsuruga Museum



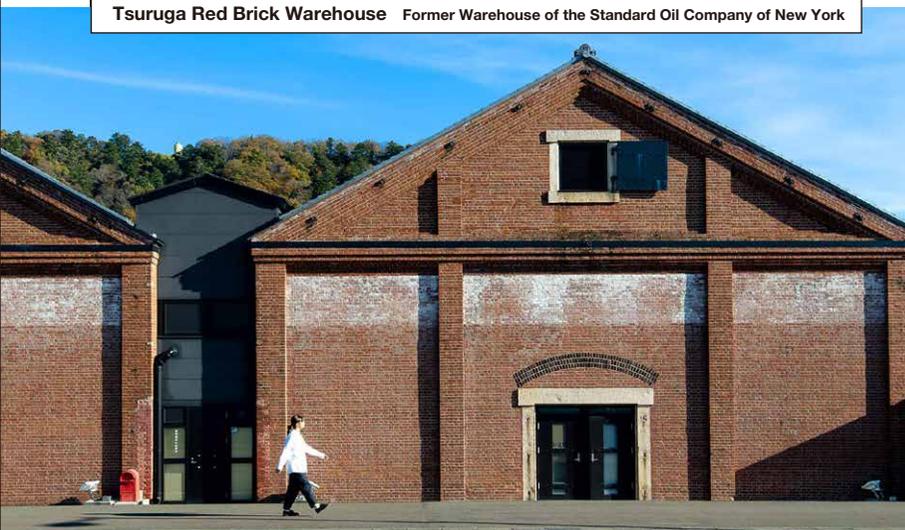
**The Only Port in Japan
Where Jewish Refugees with
“Visas for Life” Came Ashore**

This museum tells the story of how Tsuruga Port came to be known as the “port of humanity,” such as when Polish orphans were welcomed here in 1920s, and when Jewish refugees came ashore in Tsuruga in 1940s, saved by the “visas for life” issued by Sugihara Chiune.

Address: 23-1 Kanegasaki-cho, Tsuruga City
Hours: 9:00 to 17:00
Closed: **Wed.** (or following day if Wed. is a national holiday), and New Year holidays
Tel.: (0770) 37-1035

Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property

Tsuruga Red Brick Warehouse Former Warehouse of the Standard Oil Company of New York



**Brick Warehouses with
an Old-Fashioned Feel**

These warehouses were built in 1905 for oil storage, and serve as a symbol of Tsuruga Port’s prosperity as an international port that connected to Europe. Inside one warehouse is a giant diorama showing Tsuruga in the mid 20th century; the other warehouse contains restaurants.

Address: 4-1 Kanegasaki-cho, Tsuruga City
Hours: 9:30 to 17:30 (Diorama Building)
Closed: **Wed.** (or following day if Wed. is a national holiday), New Year holidays
Tel.: (0770) 47-6612



The Diorama Building shows Tsuruga town in the early 20th century.



Walk Around Tsuruga

**View of Tsuruga Port
from the Mt. Tezutsu
Observation Tower**

The observation tower looks out over Tsuruga Port, the Tsuruga Peninsula, and Kehi no Matsubara to the west, and the Nakaikemi Wetland to the east. This small mountain is a relatively easy climb — 171.3 meters above sea level at the peak — making it a great place to enjoy the view.

**A Port Town That Served as
the Gateway to the World.**

Tsuruga has long served as a gateway to mainland Asia, and as a hub of ship traffic on the Sea of Japan. In the late 19th century, it became an international port. Tsuruga was Japan’s first city on the Sea of Japan coast to be connected to a railroad, and the feel of this port town reflects its important role in transporting goods.

Walk Around the Post Town of Kinomoto



Honjin Pharmacy

The Birthplace of Japan's First Licensed Pharmacist

The 22nd-generation head of the Takeuchi family was Japan's first licensed pharmacist. The old signboards for medicines can still be seen at the former main shop.

Fermentation Culture and Kinomoto

Kinomoto has a long history of brewing sake, soy sauce, and other fermented items. In winter, visitors can buy vegetables pickled with koji — at a bookstore, of all places.



Saladroll

A Surprisingly Tasty Combination!

Saladroll is a famous local favorite in Kinomoto. These rolls are filled with *takuwan* pickled daikon radish and mayonnaise. Give one a try!



Kinomoto Jizoin Temple

Home to One of Japan's Three Largest Jizo Statues: the "Buddha of the Eyes"

A huge, six-meter-tall Jizo statue welcomes visitors, along with many frogs. The temple festival is held in August, and draws large crowds.

Address: 944 Kinomoto, Kinomoto-cho, Nagahama City
Hours: 8:00 to 17:00
Closed: Open seven days a week
Tel.: (0749) 82-2106



Kohoku Library

Shiga Prefecture's Oldest Private Library

The Kohoku Library is the oldest library in the prefecture, with over a century of a history. It is still open today, with the aim of offering younger members of the community with chances to learn.

Address: 1362 Kinomoto, Kinomoto-cho, Nagahama City
Hours: 10:00 to 16:00 (closes at 14:00 on the 2nd, 4th, and 5th Sun. of the month)
Closed: Mon., 1st and 3rd Sun. of the month, and national holidays
Tel.: (0749) 82-4867

A Post Town That Prospered as the Gateway to Jizoin Temple

The post town of Kinomoto-juku, where the Hokkoku Waki Okan and Hokkoku Kaido Routes intersected, once bustled with travelers and visitors to Kinomoto Jizo-in Temple. Experience the old-fashioned feel of the town's streets, lined with old merchant houses.



Walk Around Town

Nagahama's Culture Grew from the People Who Lived There

The culture and prosperity of Nagahama were built through the townspeople, particularly wealthy merchants. Today, the townscape blends new and old, incorporating the spirit of the townspeople from the Meiji era (1868–1912) who eagerly adopted new forms of culture.



The street, with its walls made of reused wood from boats, and gas-lamp-shaped streetlights, retains the old-fashioned atmosphere of Nagahama in the Meiji era (1868–1912), when it flourished as a railroad town.

The Food Culture of Nagahama

Grilled Mackerel Somen Noodles: A Classic Local Favorite



This local dish is made by simmering grilled mackerel in a sweet and savory broth, then cooking somen noodles in that same broth. It is also served on special occasions, such as during the Nagahama Hikiyama Festival.



Nationally-Designated Important Cultural Property

Daitsumi Temple

The Temple That Protects the Town of Nagahama
Daitsumi is a branch temple of Otani Shinshu Buddhism (Higashi Honganji Temple). Visitors can see a variety of cultural properties here, including the main hall and the large reception hall, which are said to have been built using the remains of Fushimi-Momoyama Castle.

Address: 32-9 Motohama-cho, Nagahama City
Hours: 10:00 to 16:00
Closed: New Year holidays
Tel.: (0749) 62-0054



Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property

Kurokabe Glass Shop

An Architectural Symbol of Kurokabe Square

This glass shop is inside a wooden, Western-style building painted with black plaster. It was originally built in 1900 as the Nagahama branch of the former Hyakusanju Bank.

Address: 12-38 Motohama-cho, Nagahama City
Hours: 10:00 to 18:00
Closed: Open seven days a week
Tel.: (0749) 65-2330



UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

Nagahama Hikiyama Museum

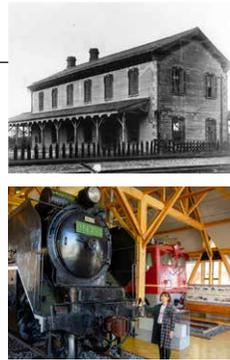
Hikiyama: the "Moving Art Museums"

The Nagahama Hikiyama Festival began as a celebration of the birth of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's first son (16th century). The museum's displays include two spectacular hikiyama floats that are used during the festival.

Address: 14-8 Motohama-cho, Nagahama City
Hours: 9:00 to 17:00
Closed: New Year holidays
Tel.: (0749) 65-3300

Prefecture-Designated Cultural Property

**Former Nagahama Station Building
Nagahama Railway Museum**



Japan's Oldest Remaining Station Building

Nagahama Station was built in 1882, from lime concrete. The building's architecture was based on the Western-style. Step inside, and experience the old-fashioned atmosphere of the stationmaster's office and the waiting room. Behind the building, you can see genuine steam locomotive class D51, and can learn the Hokuriku Line history.

Address: 1-41 Kitafuna-cho, Nagahama City
Hours: 9:30 to 17:00
Closed: New Year holidays
Tel.: (0749) 63-4091

National Site of Scenic Beauty

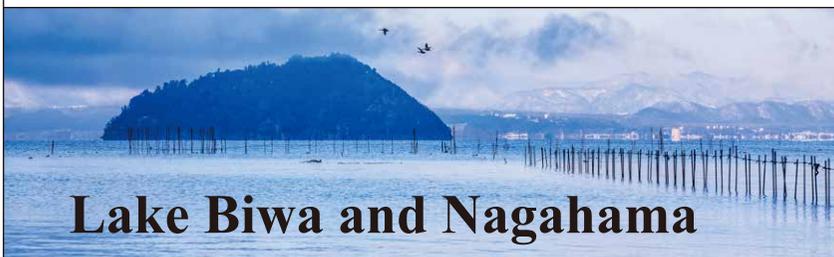
Keiunkan



**Luxurious Accommodations
with a Beautiful Garden**

Keiunkan was built by Nagahama businessman Asami Matazo as a temporary residence for Emperor Meiji. Enjoy a walk through the Japanese garden, built by master gardener Ogawa Jihei VII. Each year, the Nagahama Bonbai Exhibition, a traditional seasonal exhibition of ume plum bonsai trees, is held here from January to March.

Address: 2-5 Minato-cho, Nagahama City
Hours: 9:30 to 17:00
Closed: Preparation period for the Nagahama Bonbai Exhibition (December)
Tel.: (0749) 62-0740



Lake Biwa and Nagahama

**The History of Nagahama, Which
Developed alongside Water Transport**

Lake Biwa has long been a key transport hub, carrying goods from the North region of Japan to Kyoto and Osaka. Nagahama's prosperity began with the port built here by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the 16th century. During the Meiji era (1868-1912), Nagahama developed further as a terminal for railroad ferries, and developed a unique local culture, established by wealthy merchants and townspeople.



The Former Nagahama Port (1912)

Walk Around Nagahama



A Town Where Water Transported People, Goods, and Culture.

Nagahama connected shipping over lake Biwa with transportation by railroads, to serve as a bridge between eastern and western Japan. Even today, the city is still full of memories of this lively era, when steam locomotives, railroad ferries, and modern buildings arrived one after another.