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Stories of the Regions Traversed by the Michinoku Coastal Trail

Nature, Livelihoods, and History

A “trail” refers to a path for walking found in forests, wilderness areas, and satoyama. Traveling along such paths at walking speed reveals many things. Encounters happen. You discover the region's nature and climate, livelihoods and culture, and of course, its people. To make such discoveries and encounters on your journey, I'll weave stories to help you understand the regions traversed by the trail.





What is Michinoku?

“Michinoku” in the Michinoku Coastal Trail, which stretches 1,000 km from north to south, is an ancient name primarily referring to the Pacific side of the Tohoku region. Within the gokishichido (five provinces and seven circuits) administrative divisions by the Yamato Imperial Court, the area north of Fukushima in the Tosando (Eastern Mountain Circuit), far from the Kinai region (capital area), was called “Michi no Oku” (the deep interior of the road), which later turned into “Michinoku.” The trail route traverses the Sanriku Coast across Aomori, Iwate, and Miyagi Prefectures, connecting to the Oshika Peninsula and the Sendai Plain—the eastern edge of Michinoku.

Natural Environment

Along the 1,000 km stretch from Hachinohe in Aomori Prefecture to Soma in Fukushima Prefecture, where the Michinoku Coastal Trail (MCT) runs, the topographical features can be broadly divided into three sections. The longest part of this trail is the Sanriku Coast. This is a long coastline stretching along the Pacific side of the Mutsu, Rikuchu, and Rikuzen regions, known as Sanriku since the Meiji era. The Sanriku Coast is further divided into two distinct characteristics with the urban area of Miyako as the boundary. The northern part is the coastal terrace area extending from Hachinohe to Miyako, where table-like land formed on the seabed spreads out. South of Miyako is the rias coast where spurs of the mountains extend like ribs to form peninsulas and capes. Settlements and fishing ports are built on the shores between them.

The Sendai Plain, the largest plain in Tohoku stretching from Ishinomaki to the Abukuma River, continues. It is divided by the Matsushima Hills surrounding Matsushima Bay, with the northern part called the Semboku Plain and the southern part called the Sennan Plain. This is an area where rice cultivation flourishes.

Crossing the Abukuma River, the Abukuma Highlands begin. The Abukuma Highlands cross Soma in Fukushima Prefecture and continue to northern Ibaraki Prefecture.

Although the Michinoku Coastal Trail passes through 29 municipalities across 4 prefectures, the climate of each area, born from these three major landscapes, will flow gently together.

The Pacific coast is relatively warm and has little snow compared to the Sea of Japan side or the inland areas within the same Tohoku region. On the other hand, Around early summer, the Yamase wind, cooled by the Oyashio Current from the north, occurs, bringing cooler temperatures.

Within the 1,000 km route, the coastline shows various expressions, but the lush green pine trees are trees that symbolize the satoumi (village sea) of Sanriku. Sanriku, where northern and southern ocean currents collide, is also a boundary for northern and southern plants on land; the northern limit on the Pacific side for evergreen broad-leaved trees that are lush year-round is concentrated in this area. Sika deer (Nihonjika) are often seen, and Tsukinowaguma (Asiatic black bear) also frequently appear near human settlements.

Towns and Roads

The Kitakami River, the longest river in Tohoku, flows from the inland areas of Iwate Prefecture into Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture. To its east, the relatively gentle Kitakami Mountains stretch from north to south, and further east of that is the Sanriku Coast.

The Oshu Kaido (Oshu Highway) running vertically between the Kitakami Mountains and the Ou Mountains to the west, and the Hama Kaido (Coastal Highway) connecting coastal settlements—towns line these two roads. The Oshu Kaido, one of the Five Routes of the Edo period, is the current National Route 4 and remains a main artery connecting Tohoku and Kanto, both now and in the past.

On the other hand, looking at the coast, towns were born in a context different from the inland areas, and the Hama Kaido route developed. This was due to the flow of people and goods from the sea. Fishing villages were born, and among them, places blessed with rivers and deep harbors became larger port towns. The port towns of Mutsu were connected to Edo and Kyoto via the sea since the Edo period, with people and goods coming and going.

In ancient times, travel between fishing

villages, and between fishing villages and port towns, was by boat. However, as the traffic of people and goods increased, roads connecting villages and towns were built, roads connected with other roads, and eventually, the road connecting the coastal areas came to be called the Hama Kaido.

The formation of fishing villages is closely related to the mountains and rivers behind them. For people to live on the bounty of the sea and to build and maintain boats, wood and fresh water are indispensable. Nutrients from the mountains rich in broad-leaved trees poured into the sea via rivers, nurturing rich fishing grounds with abundant phytoplankton.

History

The coastal area of Michinoku is a land where people have lived since the Jomon period. Numerous Jomon sites remain right next to the coastline, and their shell mounds reveal that people at that time lived on the bounty of the sea, much like today.

In the era of the Yamato Imperial Court, Michinoku was outside the court's control and was a land where the Emishi—as they called people there—lived. Later, the court established fortified government offices in various parts of Tohoku and strengthened its control over the Emishi. Tagajo, which is also a place name in Miyagi Prefecture, is one of such location established as a military base for the court in the Nara period. The area from northern Miyagi Prefecture to the middle basin of the Kitakami River in southern Iwate Prefecture was a point of cultural contact where culture from the north and culture from the south flowed in, collided, and sometimes mixed.

Afterward, through numerous battles, the Emishi were incorporated under the court's control. After the Heian period, the end of which was an era when the Oshu Fujiwara clan ruled Mutsu widely based in Hiraizumi, and following the Oshu Shioki (punishment/reorganization of Oshu) by Hideyoshi Toyotomi, the Nanbu, Date, and Soma clans laid the foundation for the feudal domain administration of Mutsu, which continued until the abolition of the han (domain) system in the Meiji period.

Aomori and Northern Iwate

Hachinohe City

Hashikami Town

Hirono Town

Kuji City

Noda Village

Fudai Village

Tanohata Village

Iwaizumi Town

Miyako City

Yamada Town

Otsuchi Town

0 km

Same, Hachinohe City

140 km

Central Fudai Village

238.5 km

Central Miyako City

MCT Route





Landscape of the Trail

Hachinohe → Fudai

In this northernmost part, walk along a coastal terrace. This coastal terrace was formed by plateaus formed at the bottom of the ocean which protruded upward to make a series of stair-like flat areas from north to south. This formation is especially striking along the Hachinohe section, and in the first 8 kilometers hikers can enjoy the least ups and downs along the MCT route accompanied by scenic beauty.

Kittiwake Breeding Grounds, Kabushima Trailhead

Only 14 kilometers, or 1.4 percent of the whole MCT is inside Hachinohe City, but the rich variety of scenery including natural paths, walking trails, beaches, and natural lawn along the route will keep you entertained. This section is flat and easy to walk, and places like Tanesashi Coast Visitor Information Center are great for information gathering for your hike. For southbounders, this area is perfect for getting your legs ready.

Enter Hashikami Town. Just as you were getting used to the coastal scenery, the course moves away from the ocean and we are among fields. The Sanriku Coast doesn't just depend on the ocean: the Kitakami highlands play a major role as the source of nutrients carried into the ocean. While coastal life still revolves around fishing, venture towards the mountains to see that agriculture and livestock are also major industries, with these two worlds being inseparable and complementary.

Catch glimpses of rural culture in places like Forestpia Hashikami on the way to Mt. Hashikamidake, and gaze at free range cattle



from Hashikamidake Pasture as you walk. The MCT guides you through the culture and wonders of Sanriku which can't be fully conveyed through the coast alone.

Only a little less than 34 kilometers of the MCT lie inside Hashikami Town. Of the 20 kilometers that are on regular roads, the majority is the approach to Mt. Hashikamidake. The hiking trail up the mountain is also unusually long at 8 kilometers. Getting through this entire section in one day would be difficult, so plan to stay one night in the area.

The gentle coastal terraces stretch along Hirono Town

Next is Hirono Town, the northernmost town in Iwate Prefecture. The scenery and vibe of the coastal terrace doesn't change drastically upon entering Hirono Town. With no striking border between towns like a pass or valley, it might take a bit to notice you've entered Hirono at some point.

Hirono's landscape not only makes for an easier walk, but there are a lot of facilities a hiker could want along the way, including hot spring hotel Marinside Spa Taneichi, Taneichi Seaside





Park’s campground, budget accommodation/ coworking space Hiroknot, and Universe supermarket. Very reassuring for a nervous hiker approaching their start date.

Kokegawa River at the border between Hirono Town and Kuji City can be said to be the most in-earnest wading point on the MCT course. The river level swells after heavier rains, for example, so there are likely more days the river is not actually crossable than otherwise. Those uneasy about wading through the river or who would prefer certainty should plan early to take the detour instead.





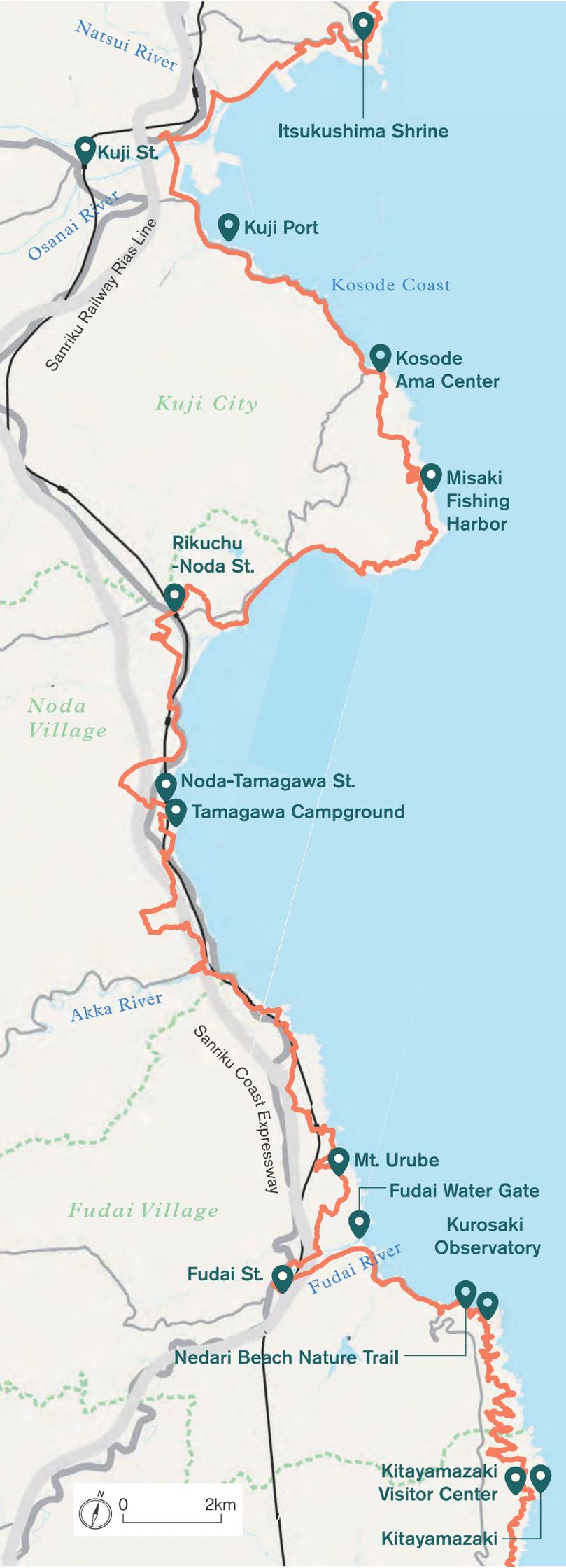
Kuji, a major city in northern Sanriku

Kuji City's section can be classified into northern and southern parts, with the city area in the middle. In the northern part, Samuraihama-cho, the climb up after Kokegawa River wading point is very steep but after that lies a relatively gently sloping natural hiking trail along the coastal terrace. This natural trail consisting of Tsubutahama Walkway, Takonoki Walkway, and Mugyo Village Walkway goes on for 11 kilometers. Hikers can enjoy their first flat hike on an unpaved trail.

Kuji City is the first large city since the start of the MCT, offering plenty of opportunities for hotel stays, food and drink, and stocking up on supplies. The way ahead is long. Don't overdo it at this early stage and make sure to take enough zero days. Next is tackling the steep hike waiting in southern Kuji.

The road walk from Kuji city center to Kosode village, where Kosode Ama Center is located, should be enjoyable and relatively easy. Next up is 7.5 kilometers of the Kosode Nature Trail, starting in Kosode area, which is a series of valleys and plateaus formed by streams. These repeated ups and downs are rough on the knees. There aren't any facilities or rest spots on the Kosode Nature Trail course, and while Misaki Fishing Harbor is on the way, it's away from nearby villages and there are few people, with only a stream for water. Plan to take twice as much as it would usually take to cover this distance. If possible, stay somewhere in Kuji City so you don't have to carry much.





Healing Noda Village and Fudai Village

While the length of the MCT section in Noda is relatively short at 18 kilometers, you won't be bored by the scenery as you walk through sandy beaches, town landscape, walking courses in parks, and logging roads. The oceanside parts of the course have few ups and downs. You could say Noda is kind of an oasis for tired hikers to recover from the Kosode Nature Trail in southern Kuji or the stream walking in north Fudai.

Fudai's section is also a relatively short 23 kilometers. About half of that distance, 11.6 kilometers, is natural trail or walking path, with the natural trail along Mt. Urube in the northern portion being especially challenging. Many spots are less maintained and there is the most "off-trail" part of the MCT walking down a stream for about 400 meters. Keep in mind that the main route is only passable during good weather and with less rainfall, so if you have less confidence in your hiking skills and strength or want to enjoy a more relaxing hike, choose the detour for your MCT journey.

Get past the challenging hike and next is the town center. One nice feature of the MCT is it goes through shopping streets, like the main street in Fudai sometimes known as "Abbey Road shopping street." Here are tasty treats perfect for snacking and walking, like tofu dengaku, sweet shops, and bread shops. A hiker, and their stomach, might be reluctant to leave the area.

Landscape of the Trail

Kurosaki → Miyako

Between south Fudai and north Miyako, the coastal shelves transition to tall cliffs. Because the coastal area has been left mostly undeveloped, rich nature remains along the MCT route, and starting with the approximately 15 km of the Kitayamazaki Nature Trail, hikers can experience some of the purest wilderness along the MCT.

Walk past Taro and while the course drops in elevation, there are frequent ups and downs: when the course climbs up a terrace it doesn't continue into a spacious flat area, instead dipping back down right away. Village areas frequently appear on the route, and therefore so do facilities for rest and stocking up.

Typical landscape of the Kitakami Mountains: Kitayamazaki Plateau

Cross Fudai River to enter the second half of the coastal shelves and more natural hiking trail. From Otanabe Fishing Harbor, walk right next to gorgeous ocean scenery that will show why this area has the unusual nickname of “Blue Country Fudai.” The less than 1 kilometer of the Nedarihama Nature Trail ending in Nedarihama Beach also has unforgettable scenery for a walking course, with waves crashing in right nearby.

After you reach Kurosaki Viewpoint, you'll be able to enjoy walking along flat land for a while on Kitayamazaki Nature Trail. At Kokumin Shukusha Kurosakiso, stay the night or enjoy the day-use hot springs. The free Fudai Village bus

goes back to Fudai Station, making Kurosakiso a possible base for hiking in the nearby MCT.

You'll probably find yourself having entered Tanohata Village without noticing. The Kitayamazaki Visitor Center marks the ends of the northern part of the MCT in Tanohata. The coastal area of Tanohata Village is cliffside with limited fishing village scenery, and along with Iwaizumi you can see the farm scenery unique to the Kitakami Mountains. The coastal road and Route 45 also pass through the inland Tanohata district, which is situated on a plateau along the highway, including the village office and roadside station. Local specialties include sea urchin and wakame seaweed, while dairy products like Tanohata yogurt and ice cream are also famous.

Along the coast, between the steep cliffs of





Kitayamazaki and Unosu, the fishing ports of Aketo, Raga, and Shimanokoshi are situated on narrow ridges. The Sanriku Railway also runs along the coast. Within Shimanokoshi Fureai Park, built on the site of the old station building destroyed by the tsunami, stands a monument inscribed with a poem by Kenji Miyazawa that survived the tsunami. The current station building was relocated to higher ground. The Western-style building, designed using the old station as a motif, is named “Carbonade Shimakoshi Station” in homage to Kenji Miyazawa. Similar to Campanella Tanohata Station, the ticket office and adjoining shop inside Shimakoshi Station sell local specialties like Tanohata yogurt.

While Tanohata is a challenging place to stock up on supplies along the MCT, Maruwa Fish Store in Raga area sells groceries and Hotel Ragaso sells local products and souvenirs so you can buy snacks and other high energy food good for eating and walking.

From the spectacular Unosu Cliff to Omoto town lower Iwaizumi

Encounter the first stream wading point since the Unosu Cliffs with Yayoi Stream. Like Tanohata, Iwaizumi is a plateau right up to the ocean and so the scenery is of Kitakami Mountains mountain culture.

From Gotenzaki is Oushinai Nature Trail, which is an easy walk of about 5 km



ending in Omoto, Iwaizumi Town. Forestry is a big industry here and the area is well maintained, though this sometimes means detours during logging and maintenance. These detours can go through dairy farming areas which in itself is a fun experience and change in scenery.

Entering Omoto area marks the end of the large cliffs of the first half of the southern coastal shelf. Stock up at shops near the station and get ready for the second half. Miyako City border is coming up right after Omoto and Moshi area.

The ups and downs from Taro to the Jodogahama Beach Then on to Miyako, the largest city in the Sanriku region

Past Taro, there are more frequent ups and downs. On the 20 km starting in Taro and ending at Takonohama Beach just before Jodogahama Beach the course dips down to coastline before climbing up again nine times. On the other hand, this route has many beaches and viewpoints that are not normally easy to visit like Mattsuki Beach. One of the great things about Miyako's section is its views. Rest areas make frequent appearances and you can hike knowing people are around nearby.

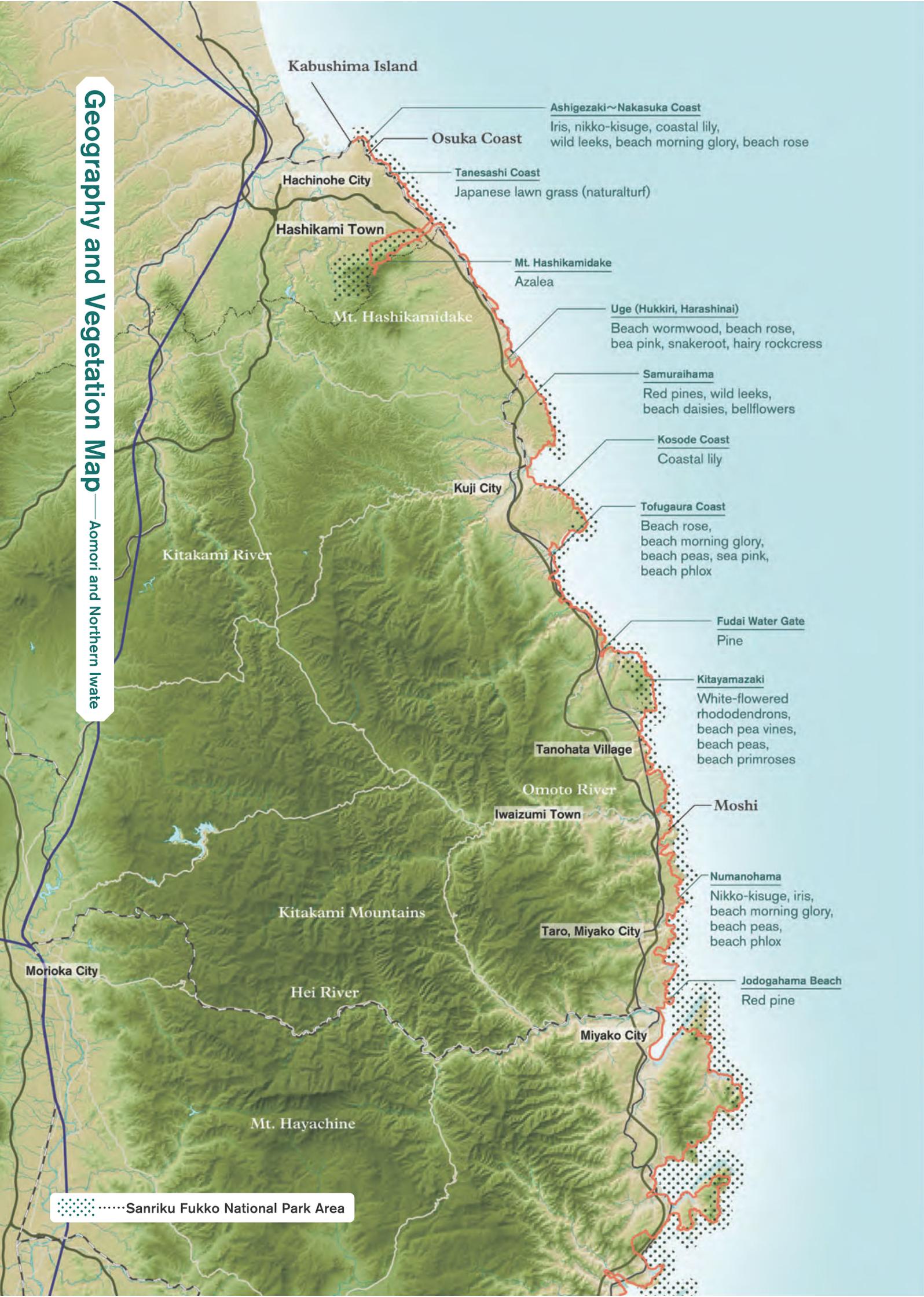
Taro has convenience stores and a Michi no Eki (roadside station) with many local specialties for sale, and hotel Greenpia Sanriku Miyako has a hot spring for bathing as well as laundry facilities and a shop. Everything a hiker might need for the trail is available.

As the MCT course enters Jodogahama Nature Trail, it winds along Anegasaki Campground and Kyukamura Rikuchu Miyako, so hikers can enjoy camping with hot springs, and a different hiking experience from the wilderness of Tanohata area.

Miyako's section of the MCT at 98 km is the third longest after Ishinomaki and Kesenuma, and has by far the most natural hiking paths at about 42 kilometers. The essence of the 1000 km long MCT is packed in the Miyako section, so this is a great section for hikers unable to hike the entire MCT and interested in hiking a section during a longer holiday. Considering access to the area, hiking the whole Miyako section would need three days and four nights.



Geography and Vegetation Map — Aomori and Northern Iwate



Kabushima Island

Ashigezaki~Nakasuka Coast

Iris, nikko-kisuge, coastal lily, wild leeks, beach morning glory, beach rose

Osuka Coast

Tanesashi Coast

Japanese lawn grass (naturalturf)

Hachinohe City

Hashikami Town

Mt. Hashikamidake

Azalea

Mt. Hashikamidake

Uge (Hukkiri, Harashinai)

Beach wormwood, beach rose, bea pink, snakeroot, hairy rockcross

Samuraihama

Red pines, wild leeks, beach daisies, bellflowers

Kosode Coast

Coastal lily

Kuji City

Tofugaura Coast

Beach rose, beach morning glory, beach peas, sea pink, beach phlox

Kitakami River

Fudai Water Gate

Pine

Kitayamazaki

White-flowered rhododendrons, beach pea vines, beach peas, beach primroses

Tanohata Village

Omoto River

Iwaizumi Town

Moshi

Numanohama

Nikko-kisuge, iris, beach morning glory, beach peas, beach phlox

Kitakami Mountains

Taro, Miyako City

Jodogahama Beach

Red pine

Morioka City

Hei River

Miyako City

Mt. Hayachine

..... Sanriku Fukko National Park Area



Marine terraces spread out from the coast Rising higher toward the south, they become scenic cliffs Gentle hills form pastureland

The foundation of Sanriku lies in ancient strata

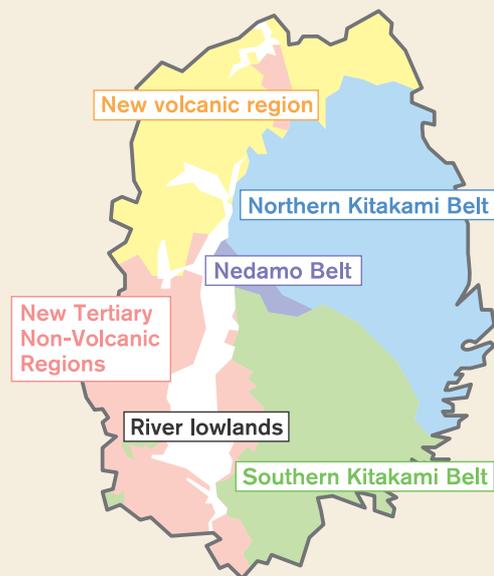
The Sanriku region has geological strata spanning approximately 500 million years ago to the present, making it one of the few areas in Japan where the history leading to the current formation of the Japanese archipelago can be observed through these strata. Due to its rarity and other factors, Sanriku contains the area designated as “Sanriku Geopark,” one of Japan’s geoparks.

The inland areas of the Sanriku region are the relatively less steep Kitakami Mountains, with a fault line that divides two distinct strata—the northern Kitakami belt and the southern Kitakami belt—running near Mt. Hayachine almost at the center of the mountains.

The northern Kitakami belt is an accretionary body formed over a long period, approximately 320 to 140 million years ago, as oceanic plates subducted beneath continental plates. It was once the seabed near the equator, resulting in a complex mixture of various sediments. The strata of the southern Kitakami belt are older, ranging from approximately 500 to 200 million years ago, and some parts of the huge Gondwana continent, which was located in the southern hemisphere about 400 million years ago, have moved to their current position.

Northern Iwate from Miyako lies a gentle marine terrace

From the northern starting point of Hachinohe’s Kabushima, gentle marine terraces are visible for a while, and the difference in height between the sea and land gradually increases around Kitayamazaki in Tanohata Village. Near Hashikami, the cliffs are about 10 to 30 meters high, with shallow rocky areas and gentle grassy areas along the coastline. As you go south, the cliffs rise, reaching about 200 meters around the Kitayamazaki and Unosu Cliffs. These straight cliffs formed when the former seabed uplifted, eroding them linearly along the direction of the strata and cracks, resulting in their current appearance. The flat part on top of the cliff extends more than 10 kilometers east to west in some places.



Mineral-rich Northern Kitakami Belt

The northern Kitakami belt is a treasure trove of minerals. Various mineral resources are abundant due to the formation of ore deposits through chemical reactions when magma erupted from the deep underground and came into contact with accretionary bodies. In particular, minerals such as sand iron and manganese are connected to the region’s life and industry, and traces of ancient iron-making sites have been found throughout the region.

In addition, in Kuji, amber, formed from resin accumulated in the soil approximately 90 million years ago, is mined, making it one of the few production areas in Japan. Furthermore, in Moshi, Iwaizumi Town, dinosaur fossils from the Mesozoic era, which were previously thought not to be found in Japan, have been discovered and named Moshiryu. In the inland parts of the same town, evidence of the largest mass extinction in Earth’s history, the P/T boundary, which occurred approximately 250 million years ago, can also be observed.



Coastal plants blooming at your feet Rare plants and alpine plants also grow wild

In this area, diverse vegetation can be observed along the diverse coastline. Additionally, in early summer, the cold yamase wind blows in from the northeast, causing temperatures to drop nearly 10 degrees Celsius and fostering a dense fog, allowing the growth of plants typically seen at higher elevations.

Ashige-zaki, Tanesashi Beach

From the Ashige-zaki Observatory to the vicinity of the Nakasuka Coast is known as the Beach of Flowers.

In early summer, wetlands bloom with irises, mountain peaks are adorned with nikko-kisuge, rocky areas flourish with daylilies and wild leeks, and sandy beaches are covered with beach plants like beach morning glory and beach rose.

The Osuka Beach, known for its “singing sand,” stretches for about 2 km, with various beach plants dotting the sand dunes. Beyond the towering pines,

many of them more than 100 years old, of Yodono-matsu, Tanesashi Beach is a natural turf habitat where horses were once pastured. Currently, natural turf and planted turf coexist here.

Hashikami-dake

The flatlands on the coastal terraces in northern Sanriku were once utilized as pastures and meadows. The gently sloping land of Hashikami-dake, now known as a place famous for azaleas, was once grazed by many cows and horses.

Harashinai, Uge, Samurai Beach

Around Uge, hikers walk along the sandy beach with many beach plants. At Fukkiri, beach wormwood, beach roses, sea pink, and rare snakeroot are observed, and at the south side of Harashinai seagate, Sanriku Coast’s iconic beach roses and hairy rockcress, listed in the Iwate Prefecture’s Red Data Book, bloom.



Iris



Daylily



Coastal lily



Wild leeks



Beach morning glory



Beach rose

The surroundings of Samurai Beach are a habitat for Nambu Red Pine, and some of the groves contain naturally regenerated red pines. In the surrounding rocky areas, wild leeks, beach daisies, and bellflowers bloom. Northern Sanriku is putting effort into preventing the spread of oak dieback caused by pests infesting old oak trees, and within the broad-leaved forest, trees undergoing fumigation treatment covered in vinyl can be seen. Coastal lilies, affectionately known as Hamayuri, bloom in early summer at Kosode Beach.

Tofugaura Coast, Fudai

Tofugaura Coast boasts efforts to conserve beach plants during the construction of seawalls after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The regeneration of plants, which were temporarily lost due to the tsunami, has progressed, and local residents, researchers, and elementary school students continue conservation efforts. Various colorful flowers, such as beach roses, beach peas, sea pink, and **beach phlox** bloom, as well as beach roses grow in clusters, thanks to efforts such as temporary transplant and root protection.

Around Fudai Watergate, pine trees were planted as a seawall forest following the lesson learned from the Showa Sanriku Tsunami of 1933, and it is said to have been effective in blocking debris during the tsunami caused by the Great East Japan

Earthquake. Beach roses and beach phlox bloom on small sandy beaches.

Kitayamazaki

The white-flowered rhododendrons seen on the cliffs of Kitayamazaki are rare to find on coastlines, as they usually grow on mountains on Honshu Island, making them a natural monument of Iwate Prefecture. At the disaster ruin at Aketohama Park, **beach pea vines**, **beach peas**, and **beach primroses** are seen around the remnants.

Taro, Miyako

Numanohama in the northern part of the Taro district of Miyako has nikko-kisuge and irises in the wetlands along with beach morning glory, beach peas, and beach phlox and beach wormwood grow closer to the sea. Around Jodogahama Beach, there are beautiful red pine forests, with many of the plants that grow on islands constituting this scenic spot of red pine trees.



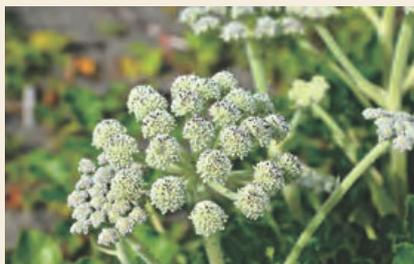
Snakeroot



Hairy rockcress



Beach phlox



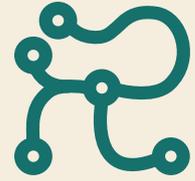
Beach pea vines



Beach peas



Beach primroses



**The main towns were those where magistrates' offices were established during the Edo period.
The coastal road and the side sea road connected them.**

Nambu Clan ruled northern Iwate

During the Edo period, the Pacific side of Tohoku was governed by the Hachinohe Domain, Morioka Domain, Sendai Domain, and Soma Nakamura Domain. The Hachinohe Domain, spanning from southern Aomori Prefecture to northern Iwate Prefecture, and the Morioka Domain, which extended across parts of Aomori, Iwate, and Akita Prefectures, were originally territories of the same Nambu family. They had deep historical connections and implemented a common Route (tori) System.

The Nambu clan originated from Kai (Yamanashi Prefecture today) and is said to have entered Mutsu during the Namboku-cho period. Among them the Sannohe Nambu clan built castles in places like Sannohe (Aomori Prefecture) and expanded their influence. After the reorganization of territories by Oshu Shioki, they expanded to the south. That was when the first lord, Nambu Nobunao, moved the castle to Morioka. When the third generation lord,

Shigenao, died without a successor, the domain was divided among his two brothers, with Shigenobu receiving 80,000 koku of Morioka Domain and Naofusa receiving 20,000 koku of Hachinohe Domain.

Shigenobu established various systems to rebuild the domain that had now become 80,000 koku. One of them was the Route System, dividing the 10 counties and 587 villages within the domain into 33 routes, each overseen by a magistrate. These magistrates' offices carried out administrative, judicial, and policing duties, such as investigating crop yields based on land survey records, managing the number of cattle and horses, and monitoring the movement of people to and from outside the domain.

The "Hamakaido" Road connecting three domains

The road from Hachinohe to Kesenuma is known as the "Hamakaido". The current Route 45 largely follows the same route. Development of this road, with its many steep mountains and slopes, lagged significantly behind inland areas, and it wasn't connected as a national highway until after the war.

During the Edo period, "Wakikaido" was intersected "Hamakaido" at right angles, served as the land routes. However, along the coast, land routes weren't necessarily the primary means for moving people and goods; maritime routes were well-developed. Through maritime transport, coastal areas across Sanriku connected with each other. Furthermore, via ports, large ships carried seafood and other goods to Edo, while also bringing culture back from Edo.

The route linking Sanriku and Edo was the "Higashimawari Route", which traversed the Dewa and Tsugaru Straits and sailed south across the Pacific Ocean. Major ports like Same (Hachinohe Domain), Miyako (Morioka Domain), and Ishinomaki (Sendai Domain) delivered annual tribute rice and marine products to the shogunate.

In the latter half of the Meiji era, ships rapidly grew larger and became motorized. Responding to residents' demands, a regular shipping route was



established between ports connecting Miyako and Shioigama.

Especially in the Sanriku region, often called an “isolated island on land” due to its deep inlets and delayed road development, patrol boats operated until the 1960s, connecting settlements along the peninsula. These served as vital transportation for residents, used for commuting to school, shopping, and daily errands.

Priest Bengyu devoted his life to building roads in Sanriku

During the Edo period, Wakikaido intersecting Hamakaido, coastal roads, connected magistrate offices on the coastal town “Tori” and Morioka castle.

The Miyako Kaido connecting Miyako and Morioka was called the “Isaba Road” after the seafood merchant Isaba. It transported marine products, logs cut in the Kitakami Mountains, charcoal, and other goods. Though a major road, it traversed some of the treacherous terrain, a continuous series of mountains and valleys, while the parallel Hei River frequently flooded.

Witnessing the famine of the late Edo period, the priest Bokuan Bengyu was deeply troubled by the lack of supplies due to poor transportation. He resolved to dedicate his life to building roads, striving to create safe passage for people and horses. Impressed by his efforts, villagers joined him, and his achievements were eventually recognized by the Nanbu domain lord.

The total length of the roads connecting not only the Miyako Kaido but also coastal villages reached 400 km. Memorial towers for the roads erected by priest Bengyu remain in various locations.

The Sanriku Jukan Railway, which began moving forward following the Meiji tsunami

The catalyst for laying railway tracks in Sanriku was the 1896 Meiji Sanriku Tsunami. The very next month after it struck, a “Proposal for Establishing the Sanriku Railway Company” connecting Hachinohe to Ishinomaki was submitted to the Minister. This later evolved into the “Sanriku Jukan Railway Plan.” During the Taisho era, movements demanding railway construction arose in Hachinohe and Kuji, leading to the commencement of surveys and construction work starting from Hachinohe. Subsequently sections like Kesenuma–Sakari and Kamaishi–Miyako opened successively. However, just before the full opening, the Japanese National Railways froze construction citing financial deterioration.

The prefecture of Iwate and municipalities along the route, representing the unopened sections, established the Sanriku Railway Company to resume the halted construction. In 1984, the entire North Rias Line between Miyako and Kuji, and the entire South Rias Line between Sakari and Kamaishi, opened for service. The opening ceremony drew large crowds of residents from along the line, who waved small flags to celebrate the long-awaited opening.

The Great East Japan Earthquake washed away JR and Sanriku Railway tracks and some station buildings. A portion of the JR line was restored using BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) buses. The JR Yamada Line between Kamaishi and Miyako was transferred to Sanriku Railway. In 2019, it connected with the fully restored North Rias Line and South Rias Line (restored in 2014) to form the single 163 km Rias Line running north-south.





Nanbu moguri (Nanbu divers), carrying on the tradition of helmet-style diving.



Propagation trenches, about three meters deep, carved into rocky reefs extending into shallow waters. They are used to raise juvenile sea urchins and abalone.

Sea-based Livelihoods

Hachinohe Port: Evolving from a Fishing Port to a Trading Hub

The origins of the modern Hachinohe Port date back to the establishment of the Hachinohe Domain (1664). It began at Sameura, near the eastern edge of the port. Initially a small fishing port, it transformed after the opening of the eastward sea shipping route, becoming a hub for shipping fish, soybeans, and shimekasu (fertilizer made from fish meal) to Edo. It also played a significant role as a harbor of refuge along the Sanriku coast, protecting ships from storms and rough seas.

Entering the Meiji era, the opening of the railway in 1894 increased the volume of goods transported by connecting land and sea routes. Renovation work was undertaken, turning it into a modern port. Later, in 1935, a shipping route to Dalian, China, was established, and it was designated as an open port for foreign trade.

In the postwar period, the port developed

as an industrial harbor with the siting of large-scale factories for steel, paper manufacturing, feed, and energy-related businesses.

It is also one of the Tohoku region's leading fishing ports; notably, it held the title for the largest catch of squid in Japan for nearly half a century until recently. However, poor catches of squid and mackerel, which have long supported Hachinohe's port, have continued, having a serious impact on the local economy. The Tatehana Wharf Morning Market, held every Sunday from March to December, features over 300 stalls.

Sea Urchin Propagation Trenches Stretching along the Coastline

Hirono in Iwate Prefecture, located at the border with Aomori Prefecture, is Honshu's largest production area for sea urchin (uni). Symbolizing this are the "propagation trenches" that stretch for 17.5 kilometers along the coastline. The shallow seabed facing the open ocean consists of flat bedrock; the trenches dug into this rock appear clearly during low tide.

Juvenile sea urchins raised in onshore aquaculture facilities are released offshore and then collected 2 to 3 years later, and they are transplanted into these propagation trenches. The sea urchins, which grow by eating seaweed such as kelp, are famous for their high quality.

The season for sea urchin is around May to August before spawning. Although sea urchin fishing for natural catch is often canceled due to high waves or bad weather, in Hirono, they are harvested from the propagation trenches right in front of the fishing port, allowing for stable shipment.

In recent years, to prevent isoyake (loss of seaweed beds)—sometimes called "desertification of the sea"—and to utilize resources, local companies have been promoting initiatives to capture excessive, thin sea urchins and raise them in the propagation trenches.

Nanbu Divers Active in Fishery and Port Construction

Hirono is the birthplace of the Nanbu moguri (Nanbu diver), who use metal helmets and diving suits. In 1989, local youths learned the technique from divers from Boso who stayed in the area to dismantle a stranded ship. While making a living through diving, they passed on the techniques under a strict apprenticeship system. Nanbu divers were utilized in fishing port construction, the installation and repair of underwater aquaculture facilities and fixed nets, and even in the salvage of ships sunk during the Russo-Japanese War and the two World Wars.

Iwate Prefectural Taneichi High School, built right in front of the sea, established the country's only Diving Course (currently the Ocean Development Course). Students accumulate practical training in a diving-specific pool and study marine civil engineering.

The Salt Road: Crossing Mountains with Salt on Cattle Backs

Regions where iron making was prosperous were also lands where salt making using iron cauldrons thrived. In this region, where rice cultivation is unsuitable due to the influence of the yamase (cold easterly wind), people made salt and transported it to the castle town of Morioka, Hanamaki, and as far as Kazuno. On the return journey, they carried agricultural products such as rice.

Noda, in particular, has flat terrain suitable for drawing and transporting seawater, and because a large iron mine was nearby, salt making developed using the direct boiling method, in which seawater was boiled down in iron cauldrons for refining. Salt made in Noda-dori, one of the administrative divisions of the Morioka Domain during the Edo period, became one of the important industries supporting the Domain.

There were many roads used to transport salt from Noda-dori to Morioka, collectively called the Salt Road. As it was difficult for horses to cross the steep mountain passes,

cattle were valued. The Nanbu Ushioi Uta (Nanbu Cattle-Herding Song), a representative folk song of Iwate, was sung by the cattlemen who carried salt on the backs of oxen. The lyrics contain the line, "Though it is a rustic country, the land of Nanbu is a mountain of gold (treasure) to the west and east"; there is a theory that "gold" referred to iron.

Salt making was temporarily discontinued with the introduction of the government salt monopoly in the Meiji era, but it resumed at the request of the state immediately after the end of the war. At one point, about 130 salt cauldrons were built within Noda alone, but the industry declined again with the inauguration of Japan Monopoly Corporation in 1949.

Salt making in Noda began again in the Heisei era. Triggered by local youths conducting salt-making experiences for regional revitalization, momentum grew, and the traditional manufacturing method was revived. Combined with the popularity of natural salt, Noda Salt made by the Noda Salt Workshop has become a popular product. Although the workshop located at Noda Fishing Port was washed away by the tsunamis of the Great East Japan Earthquake, it was rebuilt on high ground the following year, and the salt made by direct boiling with firewood remains a long-selling product.

Additionally, the bullfighting in Hiraniwa Kogen in Kuji, where tournaments are still held today, began in the Showa 30s (1955–1964) when cattle were still used for transportation. The techniques for breeding Nanbu cattle have been passed down to Iwate Shorthorn Wagyu, known for the high quality of their lean meat.



A statue of a cattleman in Noda, located in front of Rikuchu-Noda Station. Cattlemen carried salt, iron, and other goods on the backs of oxen, traveling narrow mountain routes known as the Salt Road (also called Beko no michi) while engaging in itinerant trade.

Nanbu Horses, Famous as “Fine Steeds of Nukanobu”

The area stretching from Aomori Prefecture to Iwate Prefecture, where place names containing “He” (door/gate) remain from Ichinohe (First) to Kunohe (Ninth), was called Nukanobu District in ancient times. It was renowned nationwide for the “Fine Steeds of Nukanobu.” The “He” (administrative units) for raising horses are believed to have been established in the Heian period. The Azuma Kagami, a historical record of the shogunate, contains a mention of the “Fine Steeds of Nukanobu” in the entry for 1189, at the end of the Heian period.

The Morioka Domain was enthusiastic about horse production, opening the Nanbu Nine Pastures (domain-run pastures) and placing an official titled Onoma Betto as administrator. Fine horses were presented to the shogunate and various daimyo lords, and they were also highly valued as riding horses for the feudal lord or as sacred horses. Furthermore, the large and sturdy Nanbu horses were in high demand as farm horses even in times without war.

In Hachinohe and the regions to its

south, grazing was conducted utilizing marine terraces, the Obiraki-tai (flatlands) at the 8th station of Mt. Hashikami, and gentle slopes at the foot of mountains. The Tanesashi Coast, where wild grass grows lushly, was part of the Taenono-maki pasture of Nukanobu District's Hachinohe. It was managed by the Nejo Nanbu clan in the middle ages and later by the Hachinohe Domain, with horses being grazed there until the postwar period.

Iwaizumi: A Land of Dairy Farming with History Since the Meiji Era

Dairy farming as an industry in Japan began after the Meiji Restoration. Northern Iwate Prefecture, where rice cultivation was difficult due to the cool climate, found a way forward in dairy farming based on cattle-breeding techniques cultivated during the Edo period. Within the prefecture, Iwaizumi and Kuzumaki were among the first to introduce Holstein cattle in the Meiji 20s (1887–1896) and began milk production, rooting dairy farming in the region.

Iwaizumi Yogurt, which boasts nationwide recognition, is a flagship product of a third-sector company founded in 2005; the yogurt was released in 2008. Until then, raw milk had been shipped to the Kanto region for many years, but the town established the company in response to the voices of dairy farmers' calls for a local manufacturer. Overcoming management crises and damage to the factory during the torrential rain disaster of 2016, they expanded their sales channels and increased fans nationwide.



Dairy farming in Iwaizumi, an area blessed with forests and abundant water. Since the Meiji period, dairy farming has been practiced here for approximately 120 years. [Photo: Courtesy Iwaizumi Town Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Division]



Products of Iwaizumi Yogurt. The brand pioneered the nationwide use of aluminum packaging suited to its low-temperature, long-fermentation process. [Photo: Courtesy Iwaizumi Town Economic and Tourism Exchange Division]



Sanhei Nikki, a travel diary written in Kaei 7 (1854) by Morioka Domain retainers Nagasawa Bunsaku and Oya Bunji during their journey through the Nanbu Domain. The diary also records scenes of iron mining at Obiraki Tetsuzan.

Photo(Both item) : Courtesy Kuji City Municipal Boards of Education



Nobegane, iron refined from mined iron sand and processed into flat plates.

The Kuji Area, Rich in Mineral Resources

The Kitakami Mountains contain deposits formed under the influence of deep underground magma activity. Typical examples include Early Cretaceous granites that yield iron sand and gold, as well as mines for copper ore and iron ore formed when hydrothermal waters associated with that granite magma chemically reacted with preexisting limestone.

The Kuji region flourished in the Edo period as one of Japan's leading producers of iron sand, alongside Izumo, and was known for Nanbu Iron. The iron sand was produced from deposits created when granite formed in the Early Cretaceous period (about 120 to 110 million years ago). After weathering and accumulating on the seabed about 800,000 years ago, these deposits were subsequently uplifted. Layers containing iron sand nearly 10 meters thick can be seen in the inland areas from Hirono to Noda. Locals called this doba and used it as raw material for tatara iron making.

The beginning of iron making in this area is not entirely clear, but iron tools and warabite-to swords (believed to have been used by the Emishi) have been excavated from surrounding Nara period ruins, indicating that iron making was being conducted by the Nara period at the

latest.

It became a major iron-production center in the Edo period. At the Noda Five Iron Mines of the Morioka Domain and the Ono Six Iron Mines of the Hachinohe Domain, iron was produced by tatara iron making, in which iron sand and charcoal are burned in a furnace. Within Kuji alone, there were over 100 iron mines, lined with tatara smelting furnaces and storage facilities for raw materials.

In the late Edo period, the iron was transported to Edo, the Sendai Domain, the Soma Domain, and the Mito Domain via the eastward sea shipping route, and to the castle town of Morioka by land. It was processed into farming tools, daily utensils, and tea ceremony implements. Nanbu Tekki (ironware), a traditional craft of Iwate, began when the lord of the Morioka Domain summoned kettle masters from Kyoto to make tea kettles. The Noda Kaido road, which carried iron to Morioka, is also called the Iron Road.

In the modern era, although pushed aside by Western-style iron making using iron ore, the iron sand of this region attracted attention repeatedly due to rising demand for iron caused by wars, and production continued intermittently until 1966 in the postwar period. The place name Kawasaki-cho in Kuji is a remnant of the Kawasaki Steel Kuji Factory that once existed there. City is a remnant of the former Kawasaki Steel Kuji Plant.



The *Nanyadoyara* dance performed during the annual grand festival of Naruikazuchi Shrine, held every August.

Nanyadoyara: Dancing to Cherish the Fleeting Summer

Nanyadoyara, which has a mysterious sound, is a Bon dance passed down in the lands that were once the Nanbu Domain. It is still danced today in Northern Iwate Prefecture and parts of Aomori and Akita Prefectures. There are many theories regarding the etymology of the chanting words Nanyadoyara, and it is not clearly understood; theories range from it being a Nanbu dialect to it deriving from Hebrew. In an era with little entertainment, the Bon dance was highly spirited, with people dancing until dawn or even going to neighboring towns to dance.

Folklorist Yanagita Kunio wrote about the Nanyadoyara he saw at Okonai Beach in Hirono in his book *Spring in the Snow Country* (*Yukiguni no Haru*), surmising that it was a farmers' elegy and a song of love between men and women. The melody and lyrics differ by region. In addition to being performed at festivals in each municipality, it is passed down by preservation societies in each area. In Hirono, the Kita-Ou Nanyadoyara Tournament is held every summer.

Mawari Kagura Heralding Early Spring

Among Iwate Prefecture, a treasure trove of folk performing arts, the oldest and most numerous inherited form is Yamabushi Kagura, passed down by Shugendo mountain ascetics. Among them, Kuromori Kagura of Kuromori Shrine (Miyako) and Unotori Kagura of Unotori Shrine (Fudai) are loved as Mawari Kagura (traveling kagura) that tour the settlements along the Sanriku coast. They dance to pray for big catches and abundant harvests in the region from Noda-dori to Otsuchi-dori (present-day Kuji to Kamaishi) of the Edo period, bestowing fortune upon the people.

Both tour alternately every year from the beginning of the year to early April, starting from their shrines in a North Tour and South Tour. When Kuromori Kagura takes the North Tour, Unotori Kagura takes the South Tour. In olden times, the Kagura troupe, carrying the gongen-sama (deity mask), moved through coastal settlements, performing kadouchi (dancing at gates) at each house, and at night danced dozens of programs in the parlor of a house serving as the kagura-yado (kagura lodging). Currently, they perform mainly on weekends at kagura lodgings, local community centers, or homes with long-standing friendships, and some kagura fans come from afar to watch.

The repertoire is broad, including role dances with prayerful implications, dances based on the myth of Amano-Iwato, Ebisu dances, and Mountain God dances; some programs last nearly an hour.



Kuromori Kagura, a traditional ritual performance that tours local communities for one to two months each year beginning after the New Year. It is designated as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan.



Tofu dengaku, a local soul food of the northern coastal region of Iwate Prefecture.

Kuji's Market Days Continuing Since the Domain Era

In the past, along old highways and in temple towns across the country, markets were held on fixed days known as *ichibi* (market days), where fresh seafood, mountain delicacies, preserved foods, daily necessities, and horses were bought and sold. In the center of Kuji and in Sakari (Ofunato), various stalls still line the roadside early in the morning on market days.

The history of Kuji's market, held on days ending in 3 and 8, is old, and its state is recorded in miscellaneous books of the Morioka Domain from the early Edo period. Even today, farmers, fishermen, and local seafood processors spread out products such as mountain vegetables, sea urchin, dried flounder, and pickles in the limited space. The venue is called *Ichibi-dori* (Market Day Street), and there are place names like *Yoka-machi* (Eighth Day Town) in the city.

In Sakari, markets are held on days ending in 5 and 0; it is said to have begun with bartering after a great fire in 1877. The Bon Market and the Year-End *Tsume-ichi* are particularly bustling with many people.

Besides these, spearheaded by Hachinohe's Tatehana Wharf Morning Market—the largest morning market in Tohoku—markets were established to create liveliness and regional revitalization, and annual Industry Festivals are held by each municipality.

Tofu Dengaku: A Soul Food Essential for Events

The soul food of the northern coast of Iwate Prefecture, such as Kuji and Fudai, is *tofu dengaku*—firm cotton tofu coated with garlic miso, skewered, and grilled over charcoal. In the shopping streets of Fudai, multiple shops sell it while grilling over charcoal at their storefronts, and it also lines the deli corners of supermarkets in Kuji. It is a local dish essential for regional events and festivals.

In this region, where the *yamase* blows in early summer—making it cool and difficult to grow rice—soybean cultivation was thriving. Thus, the culture of making tofu remains today, and some households make *tofu dengaku* for gatherings such as celebrations and annual events.



Samurai Ishi, a flat granite rock measuring approximately 30 meters on each side, located at Maehama Fishing Port in Samuraihama, Kuji City.

Samurai-ishi: Where the Nanbu Lord Encamped after the Tsunami

A huge monolith of granite spreading out at the water's edge in Northern Kuji is called Samurai-ishi (Samurai Stone). It is said that the name originates from when the first lord of the Nanbu Domain, Nanbu Toshinao, encamped and rested here while visiting the disaster-stricken areas of Sanriku after the Keicho Tsunami (1611). The name of the town where Samurai-ishi is located is Samurai-hama, though its origin is not entirely clear.

Sanhei Ikki: Peasants Crossing Domain Borders to Appeal for Reform

The Morioka Domain, frequently hit by famine, saw the highest number of peasant uprisings (ikki) in the country during the Edo period. The Sanhei Ikki, in which farmers and fishermen from the districts of Noda, Miyako, and Otsuchi (collectively Sanhei-dori) rose up in Koka 4 (1847) and Kaei 6 (1853), is said to be the largest in scale domestically, and its history is still passed down in the region.

Raising a banner with the Chinese

character for "small" inside a circle (a pun on the word komaru, meaning "troubled" or "in distress"), the number of peasants who started from Tanohata swelled as they moved south, exceeding 15,000 by the time they reached the border between the Morioka and Sendai Domains. About half of them crossed the domain border and made a direct appeal (osso) to the Sendai Domain.

They appealed regarding the reality of famines that caused numerous deaths, the bad governance of the Nanbu Domain, and the conduct of the magistrates. They presented 52 demands, including making the peasants of Sanhei-dori subjects of the Sendai Domain and reducing severe taxes. The Sendai Domain protected the uprising populace and conveyed their appeal to the Nanbu Domain. Ultimately, many of the demands were accepted by the Nanbu Domain.

The Sanhei Ikki became known throughout the Nanbu Domain, sparking uprisings in various places. In Tanohata and Kamaishi, the birthplaces of the ringleaders, there are graves and monuments honoring the uprising. The will of the righteous people who risked their lives to act for the impoverished masses is conveyed through plays and other means.

Shian-zaka and Jishoku-zaka: Remnants of an Era Without Bridges

In Tanohata, where settlements are formed above and below deep cliffs, there are slopes with strange names: Shian-zaka (Pondering Slope) and Jishoku-zaka (Resignation Slope). In the past, officials and teachers assigned to the village would ponder at Shian-zaka whether to continue or turn back due to the steepness of the road. Facing an even deeper valley ahead, they would finally resign from their jobs and return home at Jishoku-zaka.

For many years, traffic was hindered by deep valleys, but large bridges were built at Shian-zaka in 1965 and Jishoku-zaka in 1984. Transportation convenience improved drastically, increasing traffic both within and outside the village. The Shiino Bridge spanning Jishoku-zaka is a symbol of the town.

Miyako: Where Numerous Legends of Yoshitsune's Northern Flight Remain

Minamoto no Yoshitsune, who achieved numerous military achievements to overthrow the Taira clan at the end of the Heian period, was pursued by his elder brother Yoritomo. It is said that he fled to Hiraizumi, relying on the Oshu Fujiwara clan, with whom he had stayed in his childhood, but he eventually committed suicide. However, the "Yoshitsune Northern Flight Legend" claims that Yoshitsune secretly escaped, traveled through Hokkaido and Sakhalin, crossed to Mongolia, and became Genghis Khan.

This legend remains in various places in Aomori and Iwate Prefectures, with numerous shrines, temples, and residences where Yoshitsune's party is said to have stayed or hidden. Miyako has many such legends, including at Yokoyama Hachiman Shrine, where it is said an elderly retainer hid his identity and became a Shinto priest, and Hangan Inari Shrine, where a shrine was built over Yoshitsune's buried armor. It is also said that he secluded himself for 3 years and 3 months at Mt. Kuromori, where Kuromori Shrine is located, and dedicated 600 hand-copied scrolls of the Heart Sutra.

Scenic Beauty of Rhyolite "Just Like the Pure Land"

Jodogahama is a scenic spot created by the erosion of white rhyolite born from magma activity 52 million years ago. The unique scenery of the coast was named when Reikyo Ryuko, a monk and the seventh head of Miyako-san Joan-ji Temple, exclaimed, "It is just like the Pure Land (Gokuraku Jodo)," during the Tenna era (1681–1684).

Miyazawa Kenji, a children's book author and poet from Hanamaki, Iwate Prefecture, also visited and left a poem: "Beautiful velvety kelp of the sea is spread upon the beach of quiet light and shines." In summer, it bustles as a swimming beach.



Jodogahama, a scenic spot in Miyako, located at the heart of Sanriku Fukko (reconstruction) National Park and the Sanriku Geopark.



COLUMN

Bird's-eye View Painter Hatsusaburo Yoshida and the Tanesashi Coast

Interview

Takumi Yanagisawa

(Chairperson of the Tanesashi Tourism Association)

Bird's-eye view maps of the Showa era depicted towns and regions in a long, horizontal space. Some may recognize them as railway route maps where looking at the details heightens the feeling of travel. The artist was Hatsusaburo Yoshida (1884–1955). His bird's-eye views, drawn by traveling to various towns, have many fans and collectors. Of course, there are maps of Sanriku as well. The place that most captivated him after seeing all of Japan, and where he eventually moved his atelier, was this Tanesashi Coast. We asked Mr. Takumi Yanagisawa, Chairperson of the Tanesashi Tourism Association and a researcher of Hatsusaburo, about the connection between Hatsusaburo and Tanesashi.





The period from the Taisho era to the early Showa era, when Hatsusaburo was active, was a time when travel became popularized due to the development of railways and publishing media. Requests for the production of bird's-eye views and illustrations of famous places poured in one after another from municipalities, tourist spots, and railway companies nationwide, and he ran around all over Japan. He also received requests from various places in Tohoku; while looking for a production base, he visited the Tanesashi Coast in 1932 for a survey for the Hachinohe City Bird's-eye View and praised it as "Japan's most beautiful coast" and "scenery uncharacteristic of Japan." He reportedly decided immediately to set up a temporary atelier. Likening it to the Sea Geumgang of the Korean Peninsula, which was hailed as the best scenic spot in the Orient at the time, he named it Mutsu Kongo (Kongo is represented with the same Chinese characters as Geumgang), and, indeed, it is recorded with this place name in bird's-eye views published before the war.

Eventually, when Chokanso was completed, he moved there with his family in 1936 from Inuyama, Aichi, which had been his base until then. The two-story wooden atelier had a concrete basement, and in the large tatami room on the first floor, many disciples reportedly worked hard on production daily.

The single-story residence connected by a corridor was equipped with a Western-style reception room; Hatsusaburo, who flew around the country, used his brief time at home to instruct on production and entertain visitors.

"Printing was done at Hatsusaburo's publishing company (Kanko-sha) in Kyoto. Also, since Hatsusaburo was not merely an artist or publisher but a producer well-versed in tourism promotion, he had many visitors from the city; photos remain of visits by famous cultural figures, as well as imperial family members and politicians," says Yanagisawa.

He was also on intimate terms with the then-mayor of Hachinohe, Shigeo Kanda (1874–1947), and the designation of the Tanesashi Coast as a national "Place of Scenic Beauty" in 1937 was reportedly due to Hatsusaburo's advice and support. Hachinohe in the 1930s was in the midst of modernization, including the expansion of Hachinohe Port and the full opening of the Hachinohe Line; Hatsusaburo dedicated himself to protecting the nature of the scenic Tanesashi Coast and developing it as a tourist destination. Thanks to such efforts, it has subsequently fascinated many artists, writers, and poets, including the painter Kaii Higashiyama (1908–1999) and the author Ryotaro Shiba (1923–1996).



A section of *Michinoku Chokanzu* [Bird's-eye View of Michinoku] (Japanese National Railways Tohoku Branch, 1958, publication year unknown; collection of Yanagisawa Takumi). Multiple editions of this map, published in the final years of Hatsusaburo Yoshida's life, exist; and this version depicts the area from Aomori to Fukushima. It was originally created for viewing aboard the train during Emperor Showa's tour of Hokkaido (1954), and the version presented to the Emperor was printed on silk.



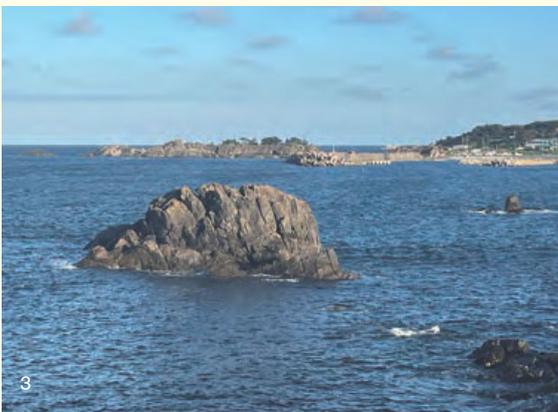
A section of *Hachinohe-shi Chokanzu* [Bird's-eye View of Hachinohe City] (Hachinohe City Hall, Hatsusaburo Yoshida, 1937; collection of Yanagisawa Takumi). The bird's-eye view maps of Hachinohe City were published four times—in 1933, 1937, 1950, and 1954. In this version, the Chokanso is depicted in front of Tanesashi Station (now Tanesashi Kaigan Station), and the name Mutsu Kongo is also indicated.



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- 1 This rare landscape, where natural lawn spreads over gentle undulations down to the water's edge of rugged reefs, served as a grazing land for the "fine horses of Nukabe" until after the war. It has fascinated many writers and artists and has been depicted in numerous works.
- 2 The residence and atelier Chokanso, completed in 1933. It

- stood on a hill overlooking the sea, and its garden featured a gourd-shaped pond (Collection: Private; Data provided by the Hachinohe City Board of Education).
- 3 The scenery as painted by Hatsusaburo can still be viewed today.
- 4 Picture postcards reproduced from original paintings.



Unfortunately, Chokanso was completely destroyed by fire in 1953. For about 20 years until then, he continued creative activities, such as producing picture postcards during the war when control over bird's-eye views became strict. He drew bird's-eye views of Hachinohe four times and left many sketches and original paintings from various places within the city. The scenery, unchanged from his paintings, remains today, and one can stand at almost the same viewpoint as Hatsusaburo.

However, according to Yanagisawa, there are several points that have changed. One is that horse grazing has ceased, and people now manage the lawn. The Tanesashi natural lawn was “formed by weather conditions such as the Yamase accompanied by summer sea fog, and the history of horse grazing conducted since the past.” Yanagisawa says that when he was a child, the lawn was wider than it is now, and scenes of racehorses like thoroughbreds grazing on the northern side and farm horses tied to stakes eating grass on the southern side were seen almost daily. However, the demand for racehorses and farm horses declined in the 1950s, and grazing gradually disappeared. For a time, the lawn progressed into tall-stemmed grassland, but now the beautiful lawn is maintained through the cooperation of the city and locals.

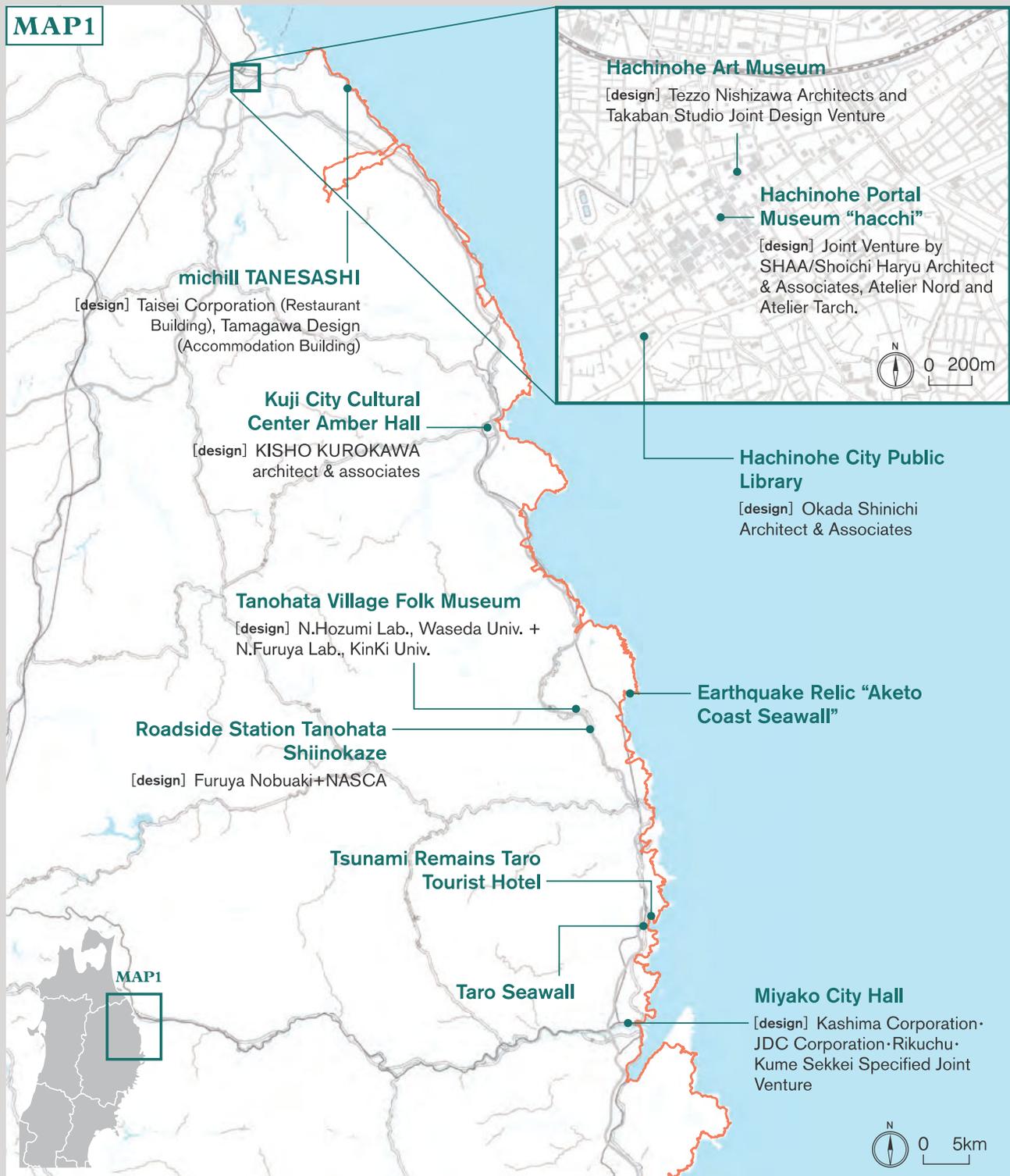
Another change is the increase in Japanese black pines. Along the Sanriku Coast are many black pine forests planted in the Edo period and managed and grown as windbreaks; however, a majority of black pines in this area were planted under national policy starting in the late 1950s, and in Hatsusaburo's time—around when it was designated as a national Place of Scenic Beauty—only the Yodo no Matsubara pine forest existed. This is also currently undergoing thinning by the local forestry cooperative, and the black pine forest is on a declining trend.

On the high ground where Chokanso once stood, slight traces of the atelier's basement now remain. “In the past, the lawn extended even further beyond Chokanso. The pines that have now become large trees were much smaller, and the view must have been considerably better,” says Yanagisawa. Two years after Chokanso burned down, Hatsusaburo ended his life in Kyoto. About 70 years have passed since then. Young people sitting on the lawn talking, tourists exclaiming at the spectacular view, enthusiasts observing the diverse variety of plants, residents walking their dogs—in the scenery Hatsusaburo loved, people are spending their time as they please today as well.

Architecture Map of contemporary buildings and disaster heritage



In Aomori prefecture the AOMORI GOKAN art project is in progress under the collaboration among five art centers. One of the art site is Hachinohe Art Museum. Hachinohe has seen growing attention for its art scene in recent years. Highlights include the Hachinohe City Public Library and the Kuji City Cultural Center Amber Hall, both built in the 80s and 90s by renowned architects. The Roadside Station Tanohata is a notable feature, characterized by its adjacent grassy plaza and large roof.



Southern Iwate



MCT Route



Landscape of the Trail

Tsugaruishi → Kamaishi

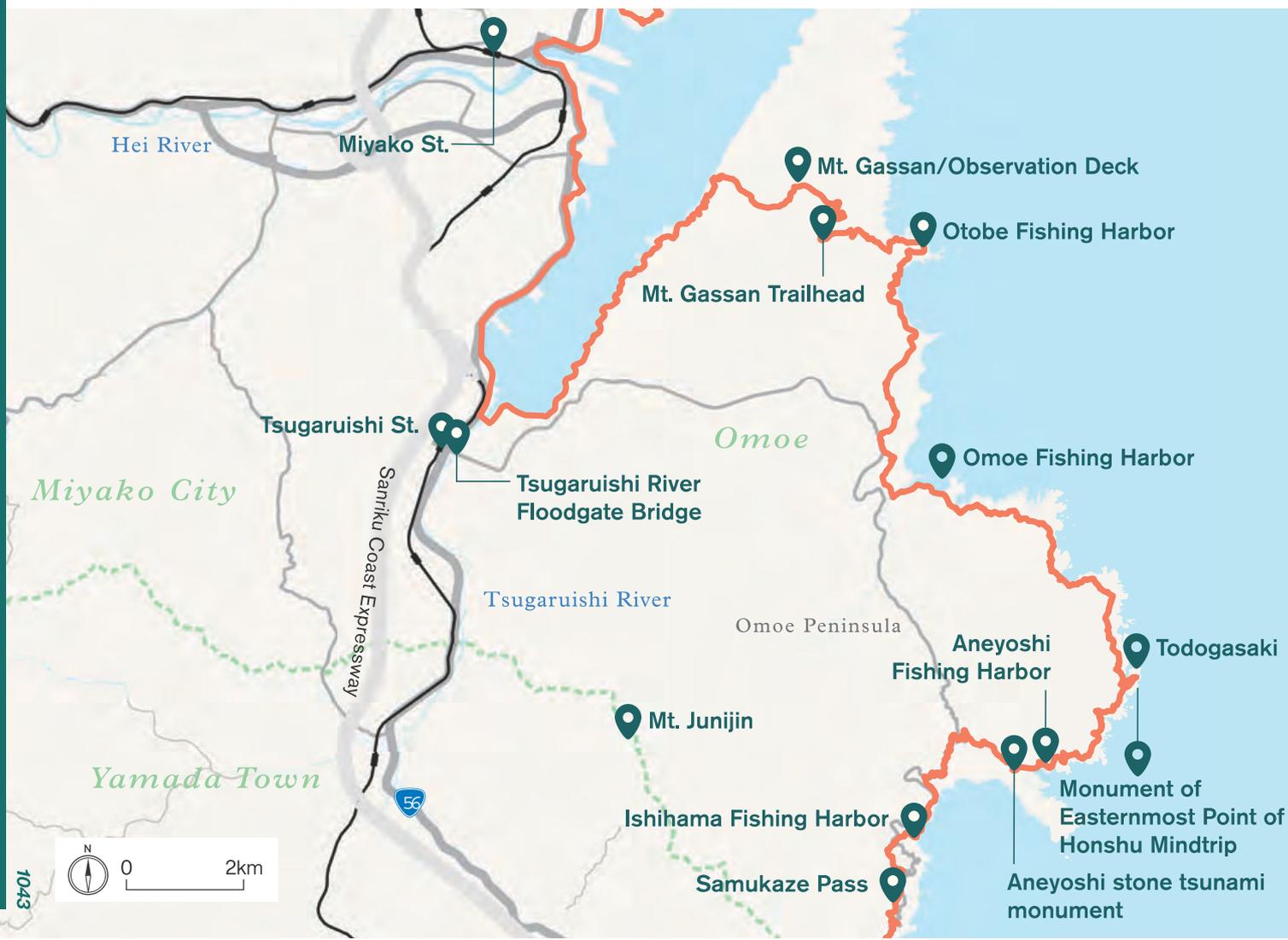
The course enters the ria coastline, formed when mountain ridges from the Kitakami highlands sank into the ocean, leaving capes and peninsulas above water. Move along the coast and cross these rib-like ridges, sometimes by going over them through passes, and sometimes circling the peninsulas.

This region treats the former Hei District, based on the Morioka Domain, as a single cultural division. The economic sphere centered on Miyako City extends as far as Yamada Town. Topographically, the area features a continuous range of 500-meter-class mountains.

Tsugaruishi River in Miyako, the Town of Salmon

The MCT course goes through central Miyako, located in the alluvial plain formed at the mouth of the Hei River, followed by about 15 kilometers of flat road walking to reach Mt. Gassan trailhead in Shirahama village. Cross Tsugaruishi River by walking over the sluice gate bridge. This river is well known for salmon runs, and once tens of thousands of salmon could be fished in a day.

Past Tsugaruishi River lies Omoe Peninsula, the largest peninsula in Sanriku. The highest peak on Omoe Peninsula is Mt. Junijin, a huge massif towering above its surroundings at 730 meters. The MCT course makes a full trip along the Omoe Peninsula including Mt. Gassan, and these 50 kilometers along the peninsula ending in Osawa area in Yamada Town will captivate hikers with its gorgeous scenery, distance, and wilderness. While there are village areas in each beach area, only one area on higher ground between Otobe Fishing Harbor and Omoe



Fishing Harbor has stores.

Mt. Gassan (455 meters) is the first mountain climb on the MCT since Mt. Hashikamidake, and while the steps are showing their age, it should still be an enjoyable climb. Other climbs are ahead, including Mt. Karogadake and Mt. Kujira. The viewpoint at the top of Mt. Gassan is spacious and shows a view all across Miyako Bay and Miyako city center. While going up every peak isn't the point of enjoying long distance hiking, this view cannot be missed.

Omoe, the Fishing Town

Enter Omoe Nature Trail from Yona on the outskirts of Omoe Village, which is a natural path that lasts for 9 kilometers. On the way, enjoy a view over the Pacific Ocean from the easternmost point of Honshu, Cape Todogasaki. The campground next to Aneyoshi Fishing Harbor at the trailhead was available for day camping only for a long time, but overnight stays are now allowed since April 2023. This campground has water, nice toilets, gazebos, and a vending machine outside the grounds, so even hikers arriving early in the day would want to stay the night. Between the campground and Omoe village lies the Aneyoshi stone tsunami monument. Aneyoshi village was completely destroyed in the 1896 tsunami and then again in the 1933 tsunami, and the monument is inscribed with this message: "High dwellings mean peace and happiness for our descendants. Remember the calamity of the great tsunamis. Don't build any homes below this point." Let's consider why Aneyoshi Campground was only a day campground for so long.

Samukaze Pass is the northernmost pass on the MCT and the first pass on the course for



southbounders. Many passes are waiting south of here to pass over ridges protruding into the sea.

Yamada Town, which has a history of whaling

Pass through Kawashiro village, the southernmost part of Miyako, and enter Yamada Town. Kawashiro area is connected to Osawa area in Yamada through a village road called Terachigoe Pass. The bus from Miyako Station only goes to Ishihama village before this area, and doesn't come as far as Kawashiro.

From Osawa area, follow the line of Yamada Bay and head toward Mt. Karogadake, crossing the pass to enter northern Osawa area and walking mainly roads through Yamada and Orikasa areas. Further south is Funakoshi Peninsula, which is like a smaller scale version of Miyako City's route with a climb up Mt. Karogadake and Okamazaki Nature Trail. The fact that there's no place to stock up may also remind you of Omoe Peninsula. At the end of Yamada City at the border between towns,





Iwate Prefecture

Yamada Town

Otsuchi Town

Kamaishi City

Rikuchu-Yamada St.

Orikasa St.

Iwate-Funakoshi St.

Mt. Kujira

Namiitakaigan St.

Kirikiri St.

Otsuchi St.

Unosumai St.

Koi no Toge

Ryoishi St.

Kamaishi St.

Heita St.

Ishizuka Pass

Mt. Karogadake

Sukuiso Coast

Mt. Tatara

Okamazaki Nature Trail

Oshima Island

Funakoshi Bay

Kirikiri Beach

Ohakozaki (Senjojiki)

Hakozaiki Shirahama Fishing Harbor

Kuwanohama Fishing Harbor

Ryoishi Bay

Kamaishi Bay

Yamada Bay

Funakoshi Peninsula

Sanriku Coast Expressway

Sanriku Railway Rias Line

JR Kamaishi Line



238.5

427

1043

Mt. Kujira is waiting. The 59 kilometers inside Yamada Town have lots of natural hiking trails and mountain courses, making for a rich hiking experience, and should take at least three days and two nights.

The central part of Yamada Town, which was an inn town on the Hamakaido route, stretches along national route 45 north to south and is easier for hikers to access than Kuji and Miyako which are spread out along a wider area. Local supermarket Bihan and day-use hot spring and hotel Yulax are compactly situated in front of Rikuchu-Yamada Station. There are also many restaurants, so this area is a perfect inn town (trail town) even now.

The Funakoshi Peninsula, a land-connected island linked by sandbars

Funakoshi Peninsula juts away from Yamada Bay in the south and Funakoshi Bay in the north, and its distinct shape compared further inland make spots like Mt. Karogadake and Mt. Tatara seem like islands. The trail course follows most of the peninsula before returning to the Funakoshi area. Covering this peninsula takes a hefty 33 kilometers, so those intending to try and walk it in a day should plan to start early.

The climb up Mt. Karogadake in earnest starts at Karogoku entrance. The peak is at 503 meters, while the elevation at the course entrance is 231 meters, which means a 276 meter climb to the top. The top of the mountain isn't spacious, but shows clear views of Yamada Bay and the Kitakami mountains lying past the villages you'll have just hiked through.

Pass the summit and it's a quick drop back



down to Sukuiso Coast. The rocky beach at Sukuiso Coast is further away from town and not super convenient, but has a nice pleasant spaciousness. Hikers in a hurry to hike the peninsula in a day will regret not being able to stay longer. Rest spot for hikers “Kinoko House” is in a former Sukuiso Shiitake Producers Association building and is maintained by volunteers.

Okamazaki Nature Trail follows a valley, without changing altitude and dipping up and down towards streams. This trail is over 5 kilometers because of all the zig-zagging, but it makes for good hiking on a natural path. There are no open spots good for taking breaks on this trail so it's better to eat at Sukuiso Coast beforehand.

Finish Funakoshi Peninsula and the last part of the Yamada Town section awaits with Mt. Kujira.

Mt. Kujira is the highest point in the ria coast area at 609 meters, and the second highest mountain on the MCT. As you climb Mt. Kujira, you also enter Otsuchi Town.

Kirikiri and Otsuchi: Models for Hisashi Inoue's Novels

The MCT course inside Otsuchi Town going through Kirikiri area and Otsuchi area is not long at 23.5 kilometers, and is mainly road walking after the natural hiking trail at Mt. Kujira. Hikers who have cleared Funakoshi Peninsula's Mt. Karogadake and Mt. Kujira will be able to relax a bit starting at Namiita Beach. Around where Oshacchi district was before the tsunami are facilities like Otsuchi Town Cultural Exchange Center “Oshacchi” as well as cafes and convenience stores. In front of Otsuchi Station is a street of bars and restaurants called Sanriku Yatai Village Otsuchi Marumaru Yokocho. Further back



in the city center is Mast shopping mall, with stores including Maiya supermarket, and there's also a day-use hot springs facility "Mast no Yu" which offers a bath and a place to eat with Restaurant Horaijima. Otsuchi, once an inn town, lives up to its reputation even now.

Kamaishi City is situated at the southernmost part of what was once the Morioka Domain. At 68 kilometers, the Kamaishi section may look like it's an easier distance, but this course going through Unosumai, Ryoishi, Kamaishi, and Toni areas (once individual villages) crosses passes like Toyasaka and Ishizuka Pass as well as going all the way around Hakozaki Peninsula, so covering this distance doesn't come easily.

The Hidden Gem of the New Okuno Hosomichi: Ohakozaki

In Unosumai, the course the MCT takes from the national highway toward higher ground is the route Kamaishi Higashi Middle School students took to evacuate from the 2011 tsunami. Looking down at the city from above to understand how large-scale the tsunami was. The course back down was used as an evacuation route as well. This course teaches that nature's beauty and danger are two faces of the same coin.

The MCT route from Unosumai Station at the base of Hakozaki Peninsula to Ryoishi Station after walking around the peninsula is about 33 kilometers, with nothing on the way to stock up on supplies.

Secluded Ohakozaki Cape (and the Senjojiki rock formation) lies at the tip of Hakozaki Peninsula, with scenery beautiful enough to merit being designated as part of the Tohoku Nature Trail.

Rather than rushing to complete Ohakozaki Cape in one day and arriving in Kamaishi just before dusk, I recommend splitting the walk over two days and taking your time to experience Kamaishi at a leisurely pace.

Kamaishi, the Iron Town

Step into Kamaishi city center, a historically thriving center of the steel industry, and encounter a commercial district surprisingly full of establishments. Shopping mall Aeon Town Kamaishi in central Kamaishi acts as a base for midway point trail restocking. Kamaishi also has plenty of hotels, including Hotel Folkloro Sanriku Kamaishi, which connects to Kamaishi Station and also offers day bathing use. The many izakayas around offer a chance at experiencing a night life that can't be seen while hiking.

Next is the Heita area, at the base of Osaki Peninsula. This time, the MCT does not go around the peninsula, instead crossing at its base and going through Hamakaido Route and Ishizuka Pass. Ishizuka Pass was on the border of the Nanbu (Morioka) and Date (Sendai) domains and follows the Hamakaido to Toni area. There is one collapsed spot on the route, but the logging road is an easy walk. Cross Ishizuka Pass to enter what was once part of Kesen District.



Landscape of the Trail

Toni → Rikuzentakata

Go through Ishizuka Pass and you enter the extensive Kesen region, centered around Takata. The Kesen region is a cultural region encompassing Toni-cho, Kamaishi, Ofunato City, and Rikuzentakata, and also inland Sumida Town, Kesen District. Currently, only Sumida Town retains the name “Kesen District” due to mergers, but during the Heian period, the district’s boundaries extended as far as Kesenuma and Motoyoshi in northern Miyagi Prefecture. In 1590, it became part of Date Masamune’s domain. This county still retains its own unique dialect known as Kesen language.

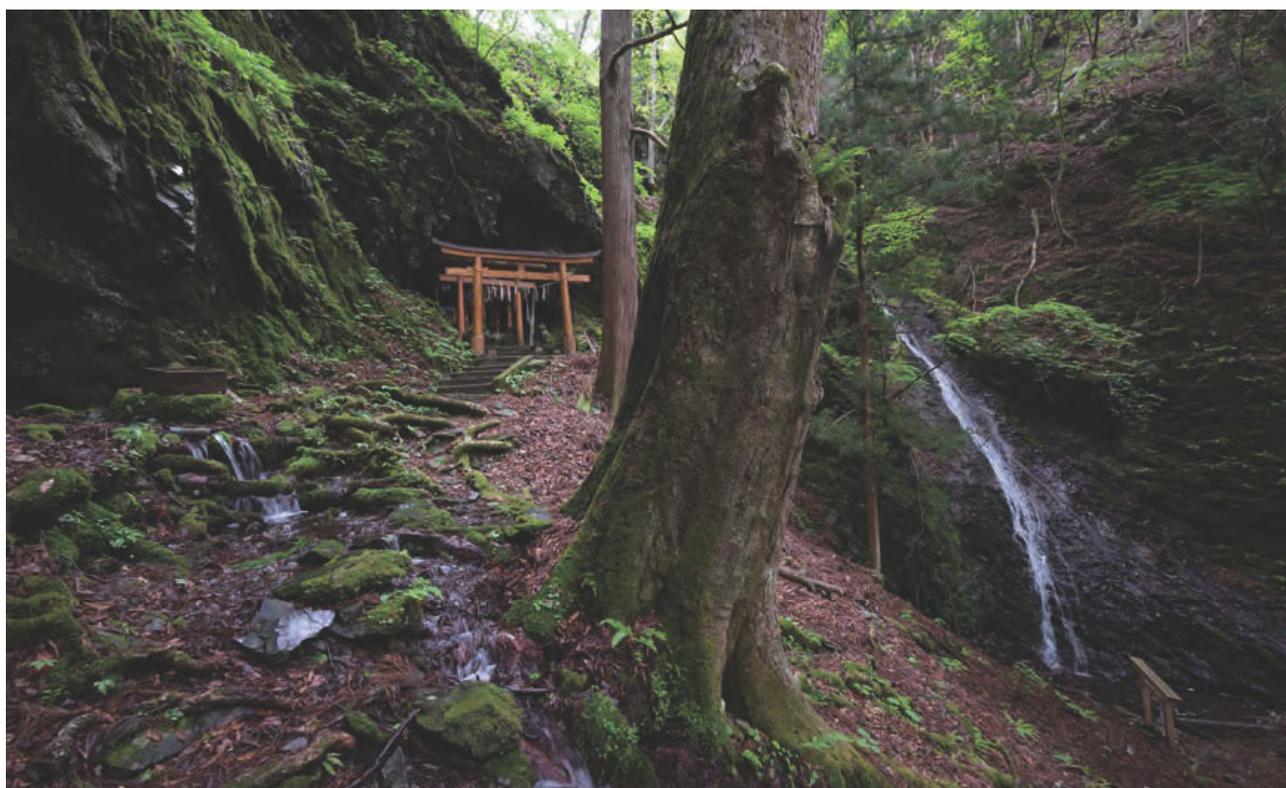
Yoshihama, Okirai, Ryori —Sanriku Town, where three I ands converge

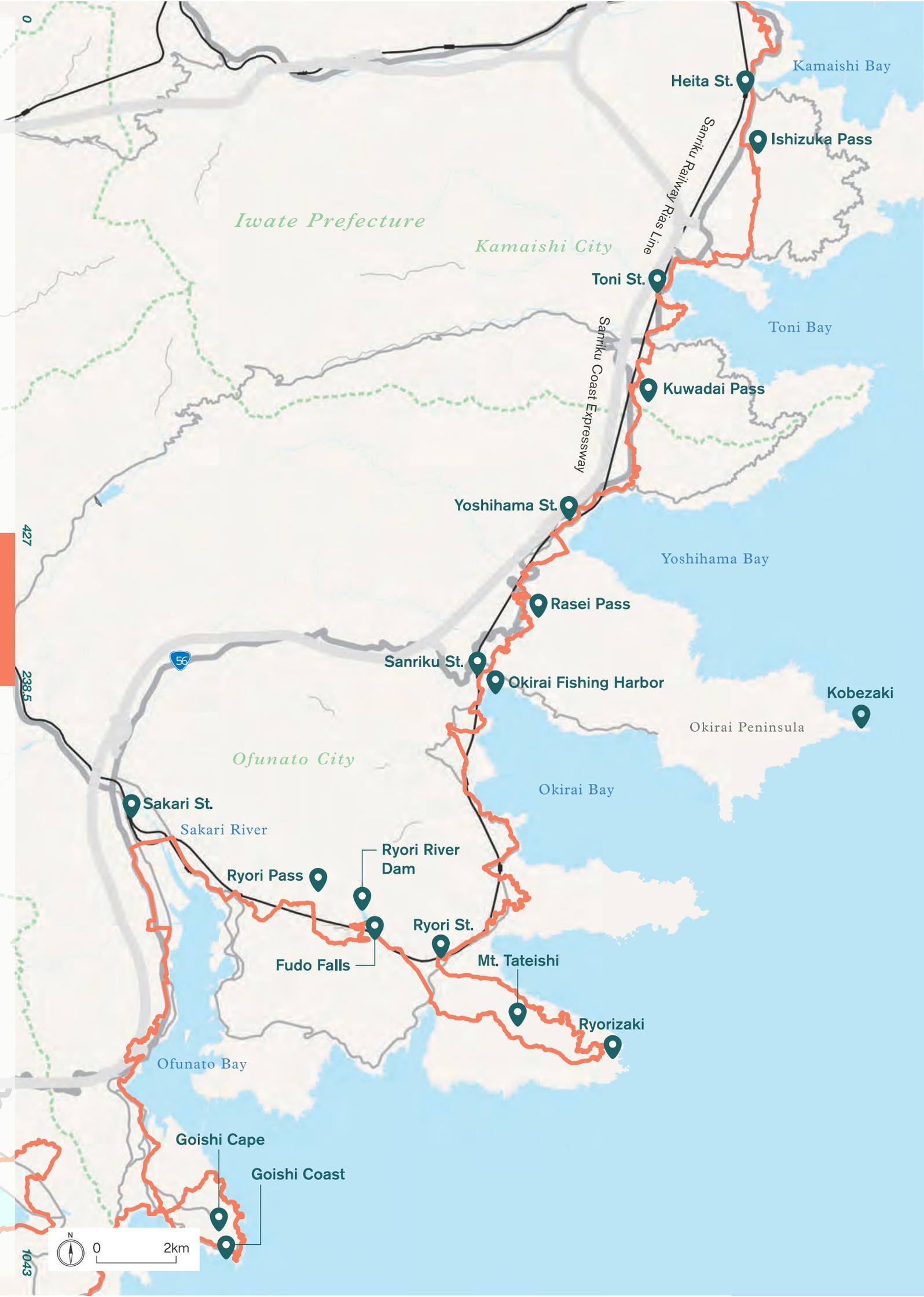
Hongo in Toni-cho was devastated twice during the 1896 and 1933 tsunami so the village moved from the seaside to higher ground. There is a stone tsunami monument at ㄗㄗㄗhe village entrance. Hongo is now known for its cherry blossom road. Over 2800 cherry blossom trees were planted here on the emperor’s birthday in 1934 to pray for recovery from the 1933 tsunami. Toward the end of April, hikers possibly headed north will likely be welcomed by the blossoms.

Next, cross Kuwadai Pass and enter

Sanriku-cho, Ofunato City. Of the 77 kilometers of the MCT course in Ofunato, only about 14 kilometers are natural trail, but Ofunato and especially Sanriku-cho goes through passes repeatedly, and the course also goes through capes extending out into the sea. The dazzling change in scenery from the road walking in Sakari area to the Ofunato area port and beyond makes the Ofunato section a satisfying conclusion to the northern part of the MCT.

In front of Sanriku Railway Rias Line Sanriku Station is a yellow building called “Shiome,” a kind of homemade community center and gathering/resting place visited by many hikers and run by Waichiryō Katayama, nicknamed Waichi-san.





Iwate Prefecture

Kamaishi City

Ofunato City

Yoshihama Bay

Kamaishi Bay

Toni Bay

Okirai Bay

Ofunato Bay

Yoshihama Bay

Okirai Peninsula

Goishi Cape

Goishi Coast

Yoshihama Bay

Kobezaki

Okirai Peninsula

Sanriku Coast Expressway

Sanriku Railway Rias Line

56

427

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Next past Okirai area is a walk through Cape Ryorizaki of about 15 kilometers that then returns to Ryori area city center. This trail has relatively gentle ups and downs and has an enjoyable 4 kilometers of natural trail along the ridgeline and going through the peak of Mt. Tateishi.

Meanwhile, note that once you pass from logging road into mountain trail this route has no toilets and no sources of water, so be prepared.

At the entrance of Ryori Kaido (Kujukumagari Pass), a road connecting Ryori area with Akazaki area on the Ofunato bay side is a split waterfall called Fudonotaki Waterfall. The gorge on the way to the falls is lovely as well. Nearby is Ryori River Dam, which has a park with walking paths. Midway along the reservoir, enjoy an up-close view of a splendid gazebo made by Kesen carpenters. There is a path going from the dam to Fudonotaki Waterfall.

Ofunato, the central city of Kesenuma District

There are two main central parts along Ofunato Bay: Sakari area, the commercial center, and Ofunato area with its fishing port. The two, as befitting the former Hamakaido route, are connected by National Route 45. Sanriku Railway/JR Ofunato line (BRT) Sakari Station is about 1 kilometer north of the trail course, but that is where central area Sakari-machi also lies, with many places to enjoy Ofunato's local eats. Sakari's morning market is held on days ending in a 0 or 5, so keep an eye on the date and visit if you can.

The last part of Ofunato's hike is Massaki Peninsula, with the hike along this peninsula starting at Kadonohama Fishing Harbor. The



MCT along Goishi Coast has a little less than 4 kilometers of natural hiking path, which may not feel like enough compared to the other peninsula walks until now. On the way, enjoy a pleasant walk through the ups and downs of the pine forest while gazing at Anatoshi-Iso Rock and little islands. If you hear the sound of thunder, don't worry: it's probably from the aptly named Thunder Rock. Goishi Coast Information Center is right nearby and has plenty of staff who enjoy hiking, so make sure to say hi. Since the trail lasts for only 4 kilometers, time spent here is too short. It might be a good idea to stay the night at Goishi Campground, relax, and enjoy that area. The scenery of red and black pines is just like Yosemite. Stock up before arrival, and you'll be able to spend a wonderful night here.

The Hirota Peninsula: Beautiful Sea and Hot Springs

The MCT in Rikuzentakata starts along the ridge stretching from Mt. Hakone to Cape Jagasaki and continuing on to Hirota Peninsula, which is beloved by many hikers. One of the top reasons is the Hirota Peninsula route map made by Hirota Elementary School students. This map, created by the sixth graders to introduce what they love above the area, helps direct hikers away from a tendency to look for tourist attractions and gourmet food to focus on something more pure. If you can read Japanese or are willing to try with a translation app, definitely pick up a copy or two at Rikuzentakata Tourism Association.

Midway through the peninsula at Ono Beach is Hirota Swimming Area, with its lovely sandy beach. There's a convenience store nearby, so it's a great spot to take a break. From the swimming area towards Mutsugaura Fishing

Harbor, you can take the walking course on the ocean side of the sea wall. The entrance to Kurosaki trail is next to a house in the back of Mutsugaura Fishing Harbor. While you will only walk the Kurosaki trail for about 4 kilometers, it makes for pleasant hiking. The course goes down to the sea in two spots, Koiwai Beach and Oiwai Beach. At the end of the hiking trail is Kurosaki Senkyo Hot Springs, where you can bathe enjoying an ocean view, and also have a bite to eat. On a day with good weather, try taking the peninsula counterclockwise, starting with a bath at Kurosaki Senkyo, hiking the Kurosaki trail, and then relaxing at Hirota Swimming Area.

The halfway point of the Michinoku Coastal Trail is in Hirota Peninsula, though the exact point differs by year because of detours. In any case, it's worth celebrating the halfway point at a restaurant or with a bento from Daily Yamazaki at Ono Beach.

Rikuzentakata, spreading across the delta along the Sanriku coast

The Sanriku Coast has few flat areas, but Takata-cho lies in the triangular plains formed at the mouth of the Kesen River. This plains area formed by the Kesen River carrying sand into the spacious Hirota Bay has historically been the center of the Kesen area. Kesen prospered from gold mining.

Now the commercial district for Rikuzentakata

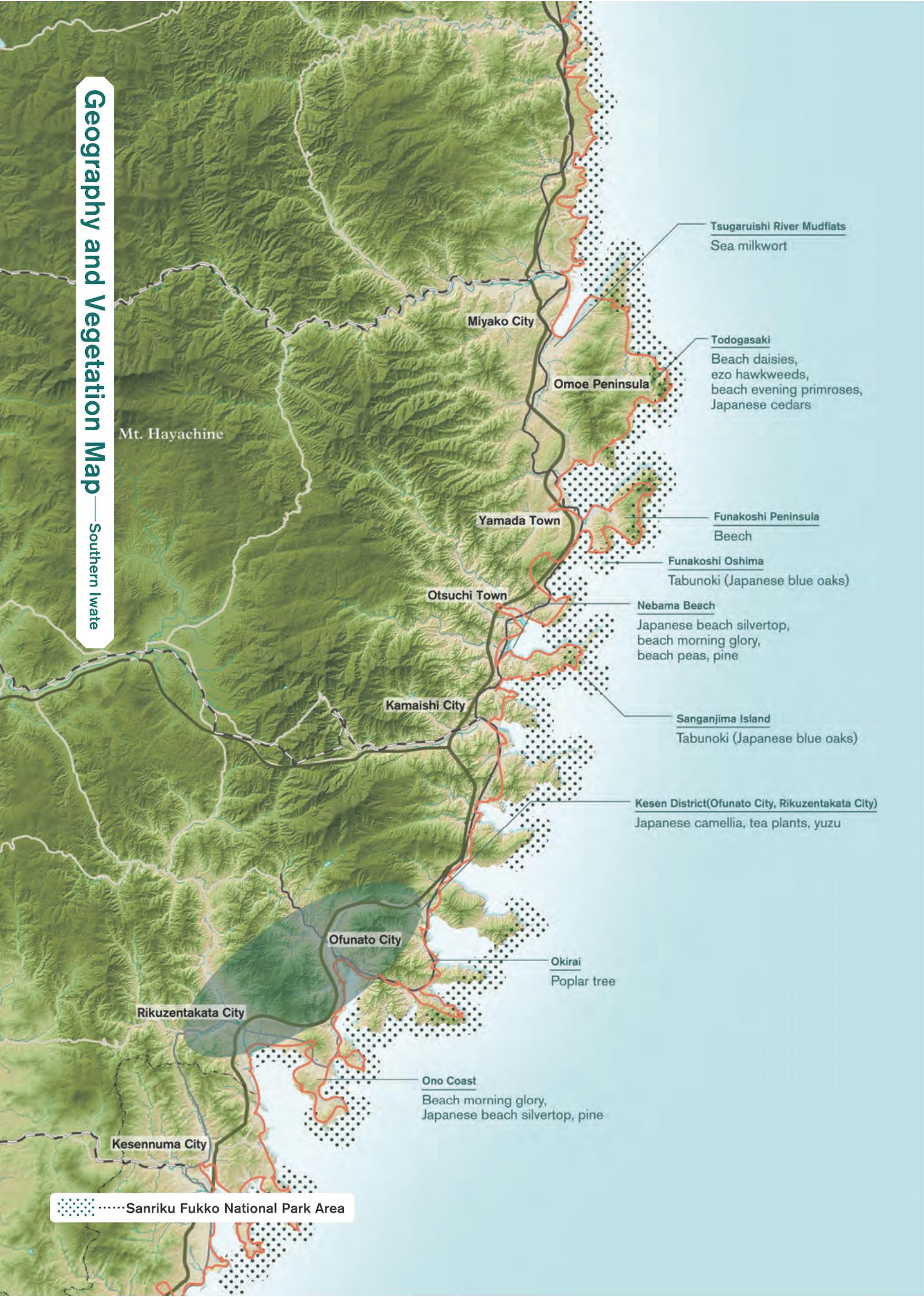


is about 1.5 kilometers inland from National Route 45 along Takata Matsubara, with the main facility being Abasse Takata. Abasse is surrounded by a lot, including Rikuzentakata BRT station, Rikuzentakata City Museum, the local tourism association, and many restaurants, so it's a bit of a waste to just pass through quickly.

The MCT course keeps following National Route 45 and passes by the Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum and Michino Eki (Roadside Station) Takata Matsubara close to BRT Kiseki no Ipponmatsu (Miracle Pine) Station, then crosses Kesen-Ohashi Bridge over Kesen River to enter Kesen Town. Kesen Town is quieter than Takata-cho, and you'll be able to gaze quietly at your surroundings on the way to Karakuwa Peninsula. Yogai Fishing Harbor is the last point of Iwate Prefecture's 500 kilometer long journey. Meeting up with National Route 4 also means saying farewell to the Kesen area, as you enter Karakuwa-cho in Kesenuma City, Miyagi Prefecture. This marks the end of the first five books of the MCT Hiking Map books. About 500 kilometers remain.



Geography and Vegetation Map — Southern Iwate



Mt. Hayachine

Miyako City

Omoe Peninsula

Yamada Town

Otsuchi Town

Kamaishi City

Ofunato City

Rikuzentakata City

Kesennuma City

Tsugaruishi River Mudflats
Sea milkwort

Todogasaki
Beach daisies,
ezo hawkweeds,
beach evening primroses,
Japanese cedars

Funakoshi Peninsula
Beech

Funakoshi Oshima
Tabunoki (Japanese blue oaks)

Nabama Beach
Japanese beach silvertop,
beach morning glory,
beach peas, pine

Sanganjima Island
Tabunoki (Japanese blue oaks)

Kesen District(Ofunato City, Rikuzentakata City)
Japanese camellia, tea plants, yuzu

Okirai
Poplar tree

Ono Coast
Beach morning glory,
Japanese beach silvertop, pine

.....Sanriku Fukko National Park Area



The jagged, intricate Ria coastline Where fishing villages have long been established in the inlets

Continuous Ria coastlines from Omoe, the easternmost point of Honshu, to Kinkasan

From around Miyako in Iwate Prefecture to the Oshika Peninsula in Miyagi Prefecture, the Ria coastline alternates between inlets and peninsulas. Both to the northern and southern areas, the coastline uplifted, and subsequent erosion by rivers formed the terrain. However, in the southern regions, the sea level rose faster than the rate of uplift, resulting in a complex and intricate coastline. Additionally, the Omoe Peninsula is the easternmost peninsula of Honshu and the largest peninsula in Sanriku.

The strata of the southern Kitakami Belt, south of Mt. Hayachine and inland of Miyako, are some of the oldest in Japan. This area showcases a continuous sequence of strata from the Silurian period (approximately 440 million years ago)—fossils from this period were first discovered in Japan—to the Triassic period (approximately 250 million years ago). Notably, the oldest ichthyosaur fossils were found in the Triassic strata of Kesenuma, providing valuable insights into the recovery process of life after mass extinctions.

These strata contain abundant mineral resources such as gold and magnetite, serving as the source of wealth for the Gold Culture of Hiraizumi and the modern steelmaking history of Kamaishi, both of which are UNESCO World Heritage sites. Even today, limestone, the raw material for cement, which is a major industry in Ofunato, is mined in this area.

Preserving the Traces of Numerous Tsunamis for Future Generations

The Sanriku region is known as a frequent tsunami-stricken area. The complex terrain of the Ria coastline amplifies the damage caused by tsunamis. V-shaped inlets narrow and become shallower as they approach the land, causing the energy of tsunamis to increase and heighten as they move toward land. In some areas, the tsunami height reached up to 30 meters during the Meiji Sanriku Tsunami. Due to the steep slopes, settlements have historically formed in flat coastal areas, with mountains looming immediately behind. Though each region in Sanriku works to pass down the experience and lessons of tsunamis, this

area, in particular, has many monuments left behind to convey the importance of evacuation to future generations.



Source: Wide-Area Geological Map of the Kitakami Mountains, Geological Survey of Japan, AIST "Geological Map Navi"



The northern limit of evergreen broadleaf trees: camellias, yuzu, Japanese blue oak, and more

The vicinity of Miyako marks the northern limit of evergreen broadleaf trees along the Pacific coast. Species such as Japanese camellias, Japanese blue oaks, Japanese snowbells, and Japanese holly, with glossy leaves that do not shed, are not found farther north. Additionally, the northern limit of the fir tree forest, a coniferous tree, is said to be within the precincts of Kuromori Shrine in Miyako. The islands Funakoshi Oshima (Yamada Town), known as Oshima of Japanese blue oak, and Sanganjima (Kamaishi) are home to groves of Japanese blue oak trees because of the warmer climate the Kuroshio Current causes.

With a warmer climate and less influence of yamase (cold northeast winds), the Kesen District (Ofunato, Rikuzentakata) has a custom of planting evergreen trees like camellias, tea, and yuzu in people's gardens to use communally. Some are actively cultivated as specialty products.

Tsugaruishi to Omoe Peninsula

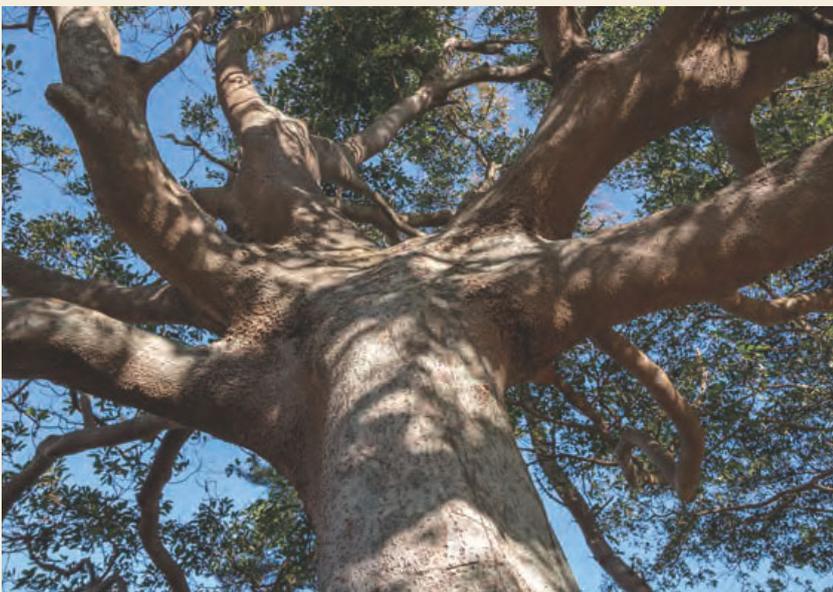
The mudflats at the back of Miyako Bay, located at the mouth of the Tsugaruishi River, are the largest tidal flats in Iwate Prefecture, where clam fishing is

also conducted; sea milkwort, a plant that grows in brackish marshes, can be found along the muddy shores.

At Todogasaki, the easternmost point of Honshu, seaside plants such as beach daisies, Ezo hawkweeds, and beach evening primroses inhabit the coastal cliffs. Natural forests of Japanese cedars can also be observed. The Funakoshi Peninsula, where one can climb Mt. Karogatake, a popular mountain with a 514-meter summit, boasts natural beech forests on its eastern side, making it one of the few areas along the Pacific coast where beech trees grow.

Otsuchi to Unosumai

In the Machikata area at Otsuchi's town center, water springs up everywhere. Before the Great East Japan Earthquake, there were around 90 naturally occurring springs and wells, which were used for domestic water. Many of them were buried due to reconstruction efforts, but on the south side of the Sanriku Railway, a biotope utilizing spring water was developed. The Itoyo, a freshwater fish, inhabits the Gensui River in the town and is designated as a natural monument of the town.



Tabunoki (Japanese blue oaks)



Japanese camellia



Japanese snowbells

Nabama Beach, facing Otsuchi Bay, is a beach with white sand and green pine trees. While the tsunami washed away much of the sandy beach at the mouth of the Unosumai River, restoration efforts have revived the sandy beach. The pine forest on the beach, which withstood the tsunami damage, was planted as a seawall forest in response to the lessons learned from past tsunamis. Around the sandy beach and pine forest, residents have planted seaside plants such as Japanese beach silvertop, false bindweed, and beach pea bloom.

Okirai

Farther south from Otsuchi Bay, several long and narrow peninsulas jut out, with settlements around each inlet. In the Okirai area of Sanriku Town, Ofunato, a giant poplar tree known as “Indomitable Poplar,” stands, having endured the tsunami. Nearby is the Sanriku Daio Sugi (Sanriku King Cedar), said to be 7,000 years old.

Goishi Coast to Ono Bay

At Goishi Coast, while walking through pine forests, one can enjoy various landscapes created by rocks, waves, and the passage of time, such as the Anatoshi-iso through-hole and Kaminari-iwa thunder rock. From the observation deck, you can also see Ryori Cape on the opposite shore.

The Ono Coast (Rikuzentakata), facing Ono Bay,

has been the focus of conservation efforts for coastal plants by local elementary school students since the earthquake and tsunami. In early summer, false bindweed and Japanese beach silvertop bloom across the area. The Takata Matsubara Beach finally reopened for swimming in 2021, marking the first time since the tsunami. Local groups and the prefecture planted 40,000 pine trees between the seawall and the sandy beach.

Rikuzentakata

In the warm climate of Kesenuma District, where the influence of the Yamase wind is minimal, the custom of planting evergreen trees like Japanese camellia, tea plants, and yuzu in gardens for village use remains. Recently, some have begun cultivating these as specialty products.

The closure of part of Hirota Bay formed the lagoon Furukawa Numa at the mouth of the Kesen River as it reaches the bay. During past tsunamis, it often merged with the sea. Plants that inhabit brackish environments where freshwater and seawater mix can be found here. This area serves as a wintering ground for swans and pintails.



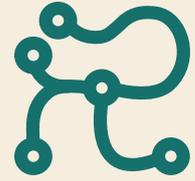
Beach evening primroses



Beach daisies



Japanese holly



Port towns representing the Sanriku region developed in a cove Trade with Edo was also flourishing

Miyako, Kamaishi, and Kesenuma have transformed from fishing villages to port towns

The Sanriku coastline, with its deep waters compared to the cliffs on the northern side and the plains on the southern side, is well-suited for harbors, as it is less affected by winds and waves due to being sheltered by north and south capes. Moreover, it is a fertile fishing ground where fish gather due to abundant plankton, and people have lived off the bounty of the sea since the Jomon period.

Representative port towns along the Sanriku coast include Miyako, Kamaishi, and Kesenuma, which evolved from fishing villages into vital hubs for logistics since the early modern period. Under the geographical constraints of the Rias coastline, where flatlands are scarce, deep harbors were constructed by land reclamation beginning in the Edo period.

Miyako Port was designated as the domain port of the Nambu Domain by the feudal lord Nambu Toshinao in the wake of the Keicho Great Tsunami (1611). It dispatched products, such as fermented fish fertilizer and salted salmon made from sardines, to Edo (Tokyo today), while importing agricultural products such as cotton and tea, as well as secondhand clothes and paper from Edo.

Kamaishi at the mouth of the Kasshi River was once a small fishing village known as Yanoura, but it developed into a major transit point for the Tokugawa shogunate's maritime transport system, along with the establishment of the Eastern Route Shipping service connecting Edo and Matsumae (Hokkaido). The wealthy Sano family sent marine products to Edo and Choshi. The first Japanese-made nautical chart, the Map of Kamaishi Port in Rikuchu Province, was drawn in the early Meiji period, and since the Showa era, Kamaishi has been utilized as an industrial port with the entry and exit of foreign ships.

Kesenuma before the Edo period had a harbor that extended much further inland than it does now. Reclamation work from the early Edo period was said to be for the development of a harbor to take advantage of the terrain suitable for large sailing ships waiting for the northwest wind. Furthermore, around the same time, the pole-and-line tuna fishing method was introduced from Kishu (Wakayama Prefecture) to Karakuwa in the northern part of the city, leading to its development in the city as one of Japan's leading fishing ports.

A post town at the domain border

In the southern part of Kamaishi City lies a domain boundary from the Edo period. North of Heita was the Nanbu Domain, while south of Toni was the Sendai Domain. A stone monument marking the site of a guard post by the Nanbu Domain remains.

The Kamaishi Kaido, passing through Tono, connected Kamaishi with the castle town of Morioka. Tono, a key junction for several roads, was the second-largest town within the Nanbu domain after Morioka. It bustled with crowds on market days. Its proximity to the domain border also made it a vital hub for trade with the Sendai domain.

Within the Sendai domain, Kesenkaido ran vertically along the coast to the castle town of Sendai. And also several Wakikaido roads ran connecting the coast line and Oshukaido, the main inland artery. The main Wakikaido routes were the Sakari Kaido, running from Sakari (present Ofunato) through Setamai (present Sumita) to Mizusawa (present Oshu City), and the Imaizumi Kaido, which transported gold from the Tamayama Gold Mine (present Rikuzentakata), developed under feudal lord Date Masamune.

Setamai, a post station, had warehouses lining with the Kesen River, and still retains the atmosphere of the old road side.





Aramaki-zake (salted whole salmon), made by salting salmon and drying them in the cold winter wind. In the Edo period, it was known as Nanbu Hanamagari-zake (Nanbu Hooknose Salmon) and was highly prized. [Photo: Yasu (CC-BY SA 3.0)]

Otsuchi Magohachiro’s “Aramaki-zake” Introducing Sanriku Salmon to Edo

The history of salmon in Sanriku is ancient; bones have been found in Jomon period ruins. In the region from Hachinohe to around the mouth of the Kitakami River, salmon around 4 years old swim upstream to spawn during the spawning season. Even in Morioka, inland more than 100 kilometers from the river mouth, salmon swimming up the Nakatsu River in the city center is a sign of autumn.

It was Otsuchi Magohachiro, the lord of Otsuchi Castle in the late Azuchi-Momoyama period, who commercialized salmon—which until then had been consumed within the region—and put it into circulation. He devised the production method of *aramaki-zake* (salted whole salmon), which improved preservation by salting and exposing the fish to cold wind, and sent it to Edo, which had just opened as the capital. This salmon was called Nanbu Hanamagari-zake (Nanbu Hooknose Salmon), was prized in Edo, and became a major financial source for the Nanbu Domain in the

Edo period.

Many legends surrounding salmon remain. There is a legend that in the Tsugaruishi River flowing through Miyako, one could cross the river by walking on the backs of migrating salmon in the Edo period. Also, the Matabee Festival is held every November 30 to pray for a bountiful catch. This ritual is said to have begun to mourn Goto Matabee, a righteous man who was punished by the Morioka Domain for helping people suffering from famine in the Edo period.

Resource conservation efforts began in the Edo period. In the Meiji era, artificial hatcheries were established in various places, and hatching and release projects have continued. However, in recent years, the return rate has dropped significantly, and poor catches continue.

A Proud Remote Settlement Protecting the Sea

The Omoe Peninsula, the largest peninsula in Sanriku, is thriving with wakame and kelp aquaculture, sea urchin fishing, abalone fishing, and fixed net fishing. About 90% of all households living on the peninsula are fishing families. The settlement is located near the eastern tip of the peninsula, 30 minutes by car from the center of Miyako. It is a region that has lived on the bounty of the sea since ancient times.

Shortly after the end of the Pacific War, they began advanced projects under the leadership of the first head of the fisheries cooperative. They devised Omoe-yaki Uni (Omoe Grilled Sea Urchin), where sea urchin—which loses freshness easily and was difficult to distribute—is plated on abalone shells. They also worked early on branding farmed wakame and expanded sales channels nationwide.

They are also known for environmental conservation activities, continuing movements to ban synthetic detergents that cause marine pollution, conservation activities for broad-leaved tree resources that provide nutrients to the sea, and tree-planting activities. Perhaps



The harvest of farmed wakame seaweed.



Wakame shabu-shabu, a Sanriku specialty made with fresh wakame seaweed briefly blanched in hot broth.

because there was little sludge on the seabed, it is said that the tsunami that struck Omoe during the Great East Japan Earthquake was not black but a “blue tsunami.”

Yamada: A Town Conveying the History of Whaling

Yamada Bay has a narrow entrance and is calm. In the past, whale and dolphin fishing were prosperous, and taxes were even imposed on whales in the Edo period. Remnants of those times exist in Yamada. Mt. Kujira (whale mountain), familiar for local field trips and light hiking, is theorized to be named after a pair of male and female whales washed up on this mountain by a tsunami.

The Whale and Marine Science Museum is a facility conveying the history of the whaling base and the ecology of whales. The massive 17.6-meter real skeletal specimen of a sperm whale was captured off the coast of Sanriku in 1987, the final year of commercial whaling.

In the Great East Japan Earthquake, it was struck by a 5-meter tsunami, but because it was suspended from the ceiling, it suffered no major damage and has been on display again since 2017.

Records of dolphin drive hunting also remain in historical materials from the Edo period.

Ofunato’s Massaki-cho: The Birthplace of Sanriku Wakame Aquaculture

Wakame is a representative seafood of Sanriku. Most of it is farmed; seedlings are grown from spores released by the mekabu (sporophyll), and they are grown large in the sea from every autumn to the following spring. Salted or dried forms are common, but, recently, more producers are shipping young, soft wakame raw as Early Harvest Wakame.

Wakame is produced widely from Kuji to Ishinomaki, but the birthplace of Sanriku wakame aquaculture is Massaki-cho at the southernmost tip of Ofunato. After the war, aiming to improve the income of fishermen suffering from poverty, the late Komatsu Tozo procured materials at his own expense and began researching aquaculture. He fashioned ropes for aquaculture by weaving rice straw. After repeated failures, he established the aquaculture technology 4 years later in 1957 and generously spread that know-how.

The Chile Earthquake Tsunami that struck Sanriku in 1960 caused great damage to beaches everywhere. However, during the reconstruction, fishing ports were improved, making it easier for ships to dock, which led to a dramatic increase in production volume.

Around 1965, Sato Keiichi, also of Massaki-cho, devised a technique to boil and salt the harvested wakame. Because the texture and color were superior to dried wakame, the salting technology spread to various places. Wakame aquaculture became a major source of income for Sanriku fishermen, and it is said that the number of fishermen leaving for migrant work decreased.

A stone monument marking the “Birthplace of Wakame Aquaculture” stands on a hill overlooking the sea in Massaki-cho, Ofunato, along the route.

Maekawa Zenbei, the “Merchant Prince of the Sea” Who Proposed the Tiger Dance

Maekawa Zenbei, who flourished in the Edo period and was called a “Merchant Prince of the Sea,” is known as the largest shipping agent (kaisen don-ya) of the Morioka Domain. His ancestors were samurai from Izu who served the Hojo clan of Odawara. Upon losing their lord due to Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s Conquest of Odawara, they fled to Kesen-ura and later moved to Kirikiri in Otsuchi.

Over about 200 years from the first to the eighth generation, starting with fisheries, they owned numerous ships and exported products from various parts of Sanriku—Nagasaki Tawaramono (dried seafood in straw bales), Nanbu Hooknose Salmon, shimekasu, rice, soybeans, and so on — to the Sendai Domain, Edo, and Osaka. They flourished as purveyors to the Morioka Domain and handled the transport of tax rice to Edo for other domains like the Hirosaki Domain. They built wealth through diversified management, including miso and soy sauce brewing, forestry management, and money lending. During famines, they opened their storehouses and gave to poor fishermen and farmers.

Through a marine transport network allied with shipping agents in Nakaminato (Ibaraki Prefecture) and others, they became privileged merchants of the Morioka Domain and were allowed to have surnames and wear swords. However, in the late Edo period, they declined due to heavy levies imposed by the domain and maritime accidents.

In the Kirikiri district of Otsuchi, the Maekawa Inari Shrine built by Zenbei and the



The graves of successive generations of Zenbei Maekawa, also known as Kirikiri Zenbei, located on a small hill overlooking Kirikiri Coast.

graves of successive generations remain. There is also a theory that the tiger dance, loved in Sanriku, began with Zenbei.

The Chida Family of Ryori Who Handled the Production and Transport of Nagasaki Tawaramono

The Chida family, continuing in Ryori, Sanriku-cho, in the northern part of Ofunato, was also a shipping agent family that brought wealth to Sanriku through the production and transport of Nagasaki Tawaramono.

In the Edo period, iriko (dried sea cucumber), dried abalone, and shark fin were valued as luxury ingredients in China, so they were packed in straw bales and exported from Nagasaki. Sanriku was an important production area for these, and Kippin Abalone from Yoshihama, Sanriku-cho, is known as a brand even in China.

The Chida family, still known today as the Sunagohama Oya (Great House of Sunagohama), was originally a fishing business owner managing boats. They employed people from Sunago-hata village as hamako (beach workers) to fish for bonito, tuna, and sardines, as well as shore resources such as abalone and sea urchin. They also hired sailors and transported goods including Nagasaki Tawaramono to Edo.

The Chida family also served as the village headman (kimoiri), and records remain that they bought rice during famines and gave it to the people. They built a hall within their grounds, and the head of the family served the role of a monk for generations, supporting the village both materially and spiritually.



The graves of successive generations of Zenbei Maekawa, also known as Kirikiri Zenbei, located on a small hill overlooking Kirikiri Coast.



The Kamaishi Iron Mine and Steelworks at the time of its early operation. Kamaishi City is known as the birthplace of modern ironmaking in Japan.

Mountain-based Livelihoods

Kamaishi: A City That Flourished with Iron from Meiji to Showa

Kamaishi, the birthplace of modern iron making, is the land where Oshima Takato, a retainer of the Morioka Domain, built a Western-style blast furnace in Ohashi in the western part of the city in 1857 (end of the Edo period) and succeeded in making iron using iron ore as raw material. The Hashino Blast Furnace, built the following year, partially exists and is registered as a World Heritage Site along with the nearby Hashino Iron Mine. Iron making in this land continued until the end of the Showa era, and the city flourished for a long time through iron and related industries, including the early laying of railways (the third in Japan) and the seven-consecutive victory of the Nippon Steel Kamaishi Rugby Club, known as the Iron Men of the North.

Modern iron making in Japan began with the aim of possessing military power to counter Western powers demanding the opening of the country. Entering the Meiji era, after twists and turns such as nationalization, sale to the private sector, and failures in tapping, 13 blast furnaces were built at seven locations within the city. Tanaka Chobei, who took over the government-run Kamaishi Iron Mine and Steelworks that had seen a

continuous string of failures, established the Tanaka Steelworks. Succeeding in tapping iron on the 49th attempt, he opened sales channels to various industries and contributed to Japan's modernization. The skills of veteran workers dispatched from Kamaishi also laid the foundation for the subsequent operation of the government-run Yahata Steelworks.

Kamaishi prospered through the steel industry; department stores and movie theaters lined the city center, and in the 1960s, it boasted a population of 90,000. However, with the end of the Showa era, the blast furnace fires were extinguished in 1989, and many people engaged in steelmaking moved to places like Chiba and Kyushu.

Gold of Michinoku That Illuminated the Great Buddha of Nara and Oshu's Golden Culture

During the Nara period, Japan's first gold—previously thought not to exist in the country—was produced in Mutsu Province (roughly today's Tohoku region). A record remains that 900 ryo (approx. 13 kg) of gold dust mined in Wakuya, Miyagi Prefecture, was presented to the Imperial Court in 749. This is Japan's oldest record of gold production. Emperor Shomu

was so overjoyed that gold was produced in Japan that he changed the era name from Tenpyo to Tenpyo-kanpo. This Michinoku Gold was also used for the gold plating of the Vairocana Buddha statue at Todai-ji Temple, known as the Great Buddha of Nara. Since then, the rulers of the times have sought the gold of this land.

The symbol for Michinoku Gold is the golden culture of the Oshu Fujiwara clan, represented by the Konjikido (Golden Hall) of Chuson-ji Temple. In Mutsu during the Heian period, wars continued. In a chaotic world where Mappo thought (Latter Day of the Law) was spreading, the Oshu Fujiwara clan aimed for a peaceful Buddhist state without conflict and is said to have expressed the Pure Land by illuminating the surroundings with gold.

The gold used in Hiraizumi was mainly gold dust collected in the Kesen region, the area covering Ofunato, Rikuzentakata, and Kesennuma. The Shishiori Gold Mine and Oya Gold Mine in Kesennuma originate from granitic magma from the Early Cretaceous period (about 120 million years ago), whereas the Tamayama Gold Mine in Rikuzentakata originates from granitic magma from the late

Ordovician period of the Paleozoic era (about 450 million years ago).

From the summit of Mt. Tatsugane, which straddles Kesennuma and Minamisanriku, one can overlook the gold mines of the area. Ruins of temples and sutra mounds established by the Oshu Fujiwara clan remain on the summit.

In the Sengoku period, gold mine development began. The Tamayama Gold Mine at the western foot of Mt. Hikami was developed by Date Masamune, who placed a Gold Mine Magistrate there, and it became the core of the Kesen Four Great Gold Mines. Mining was actively conducted in the early Edo period, but the deposits were later exhausted, and miners lived by tilling fields. Remains of refineries and mine shafts called Sennin-ko (1,000-person shaft) exist on the hiking trail of Mt. Hikami, and Tamayama Shrine is also enshrined there.

The Shishiori and Oya gold mines saw mine-development progress due to modern technological innovation, bustling with a gold rush. Although interrupted, development continued until the postwar period, and ruins (e.g., huge refineries where over 1,000 people worked) are preserved.



The remains of refineries at Oya Mine in the Oya district of Kesennuma City. The mine operated from 1905 to 1976 and supported the development of a mining community. [Photo: Mukasora (CC-BY SA 3.0)]



Kesen Carpentry and Folklore Museum, where visitors can learn about the history and techniques of the Kesen carpenters, a highly skilled group of builders from the region.

Kesen Carpenters: A Group of Migrant Master Builders

Many of the historic wooden structures, such as merchant houses, shrines, and temples remaining in the area from Southern Iwate Prefecture to Miyagi Prefecture, were built by the Kesen Daiku (Kesen carpenters), a group of carpenters originating from Kesen District (Ofunato, Rikuzentakata, Sumita).

The high technical skill of the Kesen Carpenters can be seen in the Fumon-in Three-Storeyed Pagoda (Rikuzentakata) built in the Edo period, and the Karakuwa Goten, the homes of fishermen who made a fortune in deep-sea tuna fishing.

The origins of the Kesen carpenters, who

mainly worked as migrant laborers, are not entirely clear, but historical records indicate they were already going to the Sendai castle town in the early Edo period. Kesen District has a topography where forests approach close to the settlements, leaving little land for cultivation. On the other hand, Kesen Cedar has long been known as good timber. Among the Kesen carpenters, there were also those who handled kobiki (sawing) and carvings for Buddhist altars.

Techniques were passed down through a strict apprenticeship system. In the Meiji era, they also undertook Western-style architecture such as schools and churches. They were entrusted with sites in Hokkaido, Kanto, and Kansai, and they played a part in the reconstruction from the Great Kanto Earthquake.



Big Catch Flags Conveying Hauls and Coloring Festivals

Brightly colored tairyobata (big catch flags) are seen at ports across the country. In Sanriku, they are hoisted as lucky charms in various situations such as traditional festivals, sports events, celebrations for new houses, and decorations for restaurants. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, they became a symbolic motif for the reconstruction of port towns.

Originally, in the era before radios, they were made to inform people at the port of a big catch by hoisting a large flag from far out at sea. Upon confirming the big catch flag, people at the port would boil water and prepare to welcome the ship.

After the development of radio, they were hoisted for the launching ceremonies of new ships, departures at the beginning of the year, and the start of fishing seasons. In the hikifune (boat parades) of autumn festivals in Otsuchi and Kamaishi, fishing boats flutter big catch flags as they circle the bay.

Dyeing shops that produce big catch flags still exist in places like Kesenuma. At some regions, they are called furaiki (fortune coming flag).

Tiger Dance of Sanriku, Spiritedly Praying for Big Catches

There are various theories regarding the origin of the toramai (tiger dance), a traditional performing art essential to Sanriku festivals. One theory is that Maekawa Zenbei, a shipping agent in the Edo period, was moved by the tiger slaying scene in the play Kokusenya Kassen (The Battles of Coxinga) he saw in Edo and had a tiger head made and accompanied by music. Another theory says it originated when Maekawa Zenbei's sailors danced in local Osawa (Yamada).

Fishing boats flying large catch flags during the hikifune (boat parades) festivals of the Kamaishi Festival.

Based on the proverb "A tiger travels a thousand ri and returns a thousand ri in a day," it is danced to pray for safe voyages and big catches. The sight of dancers shaking the tiger head to the spirited sounds of drums, flutes, and gongs is a symbol of fishing towns.

There are nearly 20 groups from Yamada to the area of Kesenuma, each with different music, dances, and programs. Although many groups lost their floats and tiger heads due to the tsunami of the Great East Japan Earthquake, they revived with support from all over the country. They are invited to various places nationwide as symbols of reconstruction to perform.

Sanriku Festivals: The Year's Greatest Liveliness and Bustle

In the area from Miyako to Kamaishi, the autumn festival is the biggest annual event. It is said, "Those who don't come home even for Bon or New Year's, they come home for the festival," and people who have left the area return for the festival, making it very lively.

The highlight of festivals in Otsuchi and Kamaishi is the hikifune (boat parade), where a fleet of fishing boats decorated in full regalia (mankanshoku), carrying the goshintai (sacred object) and local performing arts groups, circles the bay. The beach is enveloped in excitement, and it is crowded with both locals and tourists.

The mikoshi togyo (parade of portable shrines) through the town is rich in local color. In Kamaishi, the portable shrines of Osaki Shrine (god of fishing) and Yama Shrine (governing iron making) tour jointly. During the festival period, kadouchi (dancing at gates), where folk performing arts groups like the tiger dance bestow fortune upon shops and homes, takes place everywhere.



Stone Monuments Across the Region Conveying Warnings of Frequent Tsunamis

In the three prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima, there are about 300 stone monuments erected shortly after major disasters: the Meiji and Showa Sanriku Tsunamis (1896, 1933) and the Chile Earthquake Tsunami (1960). Inscribed on them are summaries of the damage in each settlement, condolences for the victims, and words conveying warnings to future generations. Many monuments were also built after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

The Aneyoshi settlement in Omoe, Miyako, escaped damage during the 2011 tsunami by adhering to the monument's warning. The settlement was almost completely wiped out in the Meiji and Showa great tsunamis and moved to high ground about 800 meters from the coast. Since then, they have observed the teaching of the Great Tsunami Memorial Monument inscribed with, "Do not build homes below this point." There is also a monument conveying the reach point of the 2011 tsunami on land about 50 meters below the settlement; both are on the road along the route.

In Katagishi Town and Toni Town in Kamaishi, stone monuments conveying the history of tsunamis also line the route.



Stone monuments in the Aneyoshi settlement conveying the devastation of the Showa Sanriku Earthquake.

Jomon Shell Mounds Evoking Ancient Life

There are numerous ruins from the Jomon period in Sanriku. In particular, shell mounds are densely concentrated in the hilly areas facing Ofunato Bay, conveying the Jomon lifestyle to the present.

At the Takonoura Shell Mound from the Early to Middle Jomon period (approx. 5,500–4,000 years ago), in addition to skeletal remains buried in a flexed position and dwelling traces, a shell mound over 2 meters thick has been found. Excavated items include fishing gear such as fishhooks, stone tools, earthenware, shellfish like Pacific oysters, fish bones like tuna and sea bream, and mammal bones like deer.

There are also the Shimofunato Shell Mound from the Late to Final Jomon period (approx. 3,500–2,200 years ago) and the Obora Shell Mound from the Final Jomon period (approx. 3,000–2,200 years ago). Bone and antler fishing gear found at the Ohora Shell Mound reveal that people at the time possessed high fishing techniques and lived on the rich bounty of the sea.



The Ohora Shell Mound and Ofunato Port, seen from the hills east of the Ofunato waterfront.

Shiome, A Sanctuary for Hikers Where Locals and Outsiders Mingle

Opened in 2012 in Okirai, Sanriku-cho, Ofunato, Shiome (Current Rip) was named with the hope that it would become a place where people interact, just as current rips where ocean currents mix attract fish. For several years after the disaster, it served as a base for disaster volunteers and later as a “sanctuary” for hikers, welcoming various people from outside the region.

Okirai suffered devastating damage from the tsunami of the Great East Japan Earthquake. It was Katayama Waichiryo, a local resident, who built Shiome on land left barren by the tsunami. Constructed together with volunteers from inside and outside the city using scrap wood from debris, Shiome is a warm space colored by colorful murals painted by children. It is loved by the community as a place where children who lost their playgrounds in the disaster spend time after school, and where locals come to have tea. As a “Disaster Museum,” it displays photos conveying local history and pictures of future Okirai drawn by children.

With reconstruction work progressing, it moved nearby in 2018, but the evacuation stairs of the former Okirai Elementary School, which triggered the creation of Shiome, are still preserved. Located right near Sanriku Station on the Sanriku Railway, Katayama and Shiome are known to hikers as trail angels.

“-rain” and “Bababa!”: The Unique Kesen Dialect

Many unique words are spoken daily in Kesen District; these are called Kesen language. It was named by Dr. Yamaura Harutsugu, a practitioner in Ofunato, who conveys the

characteristics and value of Kesen language through many books such as Introduction to Kesen-go (Kesen-go Nyumon), Great Dictionary of Kesen Language (Kesen-go Daijiten), and The New Testament in Kesen Language (Kesen-go Shinyaku Seisho).

Typical examples include expressions adding “-rain” to the end of words, such as “Hamarain” (Welcome/Come in) and “Nemarain” (Please sit), and “Bababa!” used when surprised. Commercial facilities and restaurants completed in recent years have also been given names derived from Kesen language, such as Abasse (Let’s go), Kyassen (Welcome), and Kerasse (Please give me).

Local Koppe-pan Loved by the Community

Fukuda Pan, often said to be the origin of the nationwide koppe-pan (hot dog bun) boom, lines supermarkets throughout Iwate Prefecture, but the coastal areas also have local koppe-pan loved by the community.

At the storefront of Somaya Confectionery, a long-established shop in Miyako, nostalgic and reassuring standard products line up, from side-dish types like egg salad to peanut butter.

Cream Sando, often called the “soul food of Kesenuma citizens,” is a simple product with cream sandwiched in a fluffy koppe-pan, marked by its retro packaging. Born at Okutamaya in the city and manufactured by Kesenuma Baking and others, it has been manufactured and sold by Kesenuma Pan Kobo since 2002 and can be bought at supermarkets, hospitals, and school stores in the surrounding area.

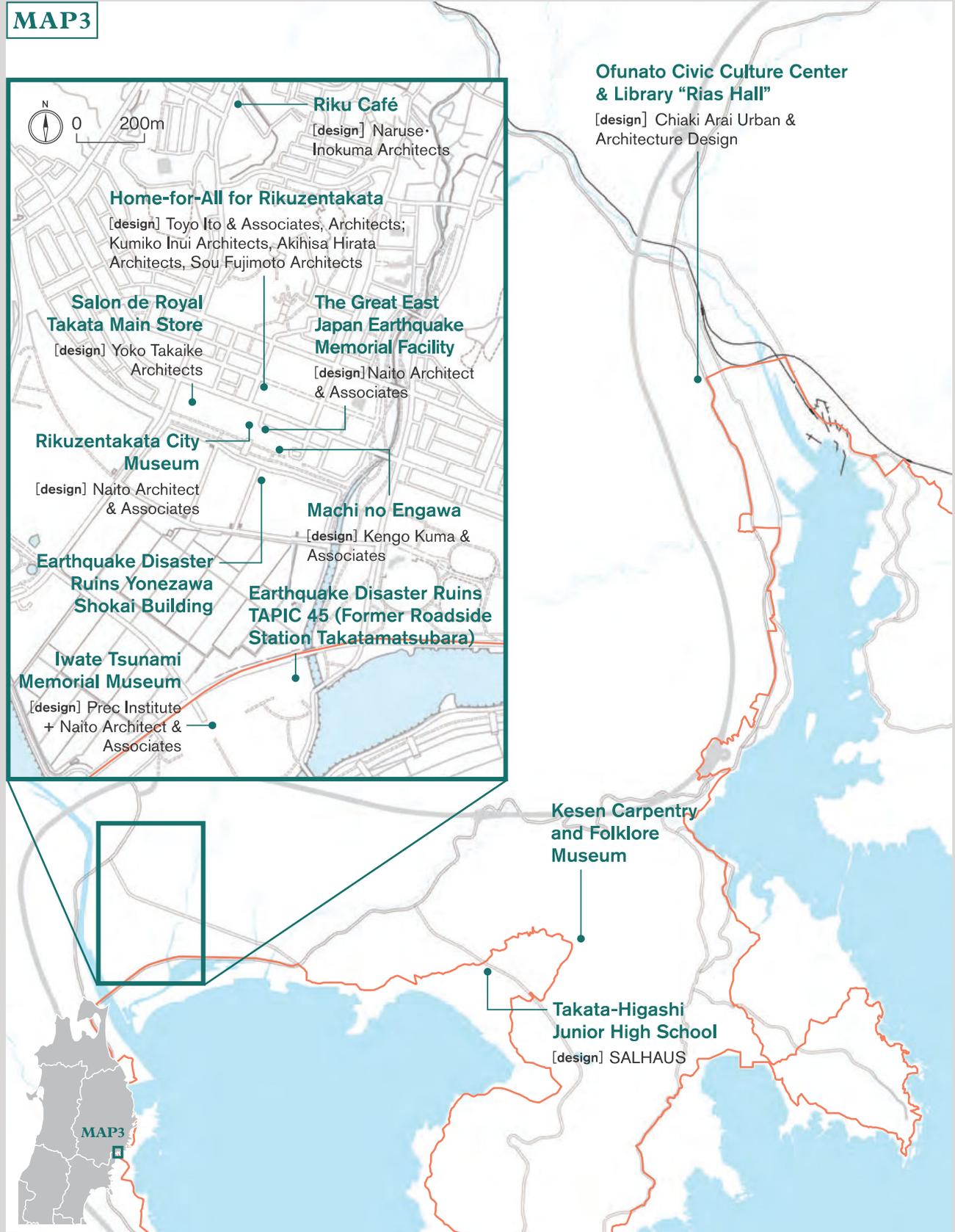
Yamada Bay Bakery was founded after the disaster. Their bread, made with particular care using Iwate wheat and natural yeast, ranges widely from hard types to sliced bread and sweet buns. Their koppe-pan sandwiched with jam is also popular.



MAP2



Following the earthquake, numerous public facilities were constructed as part of reconstruction projects. Examples include the Kamaishi Unosumai Stadium, Kamaishi Civic Hall TETTO, Otsuchi Town Cultural Communication Center “Oshatchi,” and Unosumai Tomosu, among countless others. Architect-designed elementary and junior high schools for reconstruction have also been realized. In Rikuzentakata, which lost buildings across a wide area, notable structures like Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum, the City Museum, Home for All, and Riku Café have been built, forming a new urban center.



Northern Miyagi

554 km
Karakuwa,
Kesennuma City

Kesennuma City

Minamisanriku Town

709 km
Kitakamicho
Jusanhama,
Ishinomaki City

Ishinomaki City

Onagawa Town

Higashimatsushima
City

Matsushima
Town

890 km
Nobiru,
Higashi-Matushima City

MCT Route

238.5

890

1043



Landscape of the Trail

Kesenuma → Kitakamicho-Jusanhama

Karakuwa Peninsula, Kesenuma City marks the beginning of Miyagi Prefecture. The culture of Kesenuma District in Nanbu Domain gradually gives way to that of the Sendai Domain as one travels southward from here.

The MCT course traces faithfully along the shoreline. The paved road is relatively flat and the only ups and downs are the road walk to and from Oya Mine Remains and the hiking trail up 511m Mt. Tatsugane.

The diverse landscapes of Kesenuma: peninsulas, islands, and urban areas

At 102 kilometers, the amount of distance the MCT covers in Kesenuma is second only to Ishinomaki, but since Ishinomaki's section is interrupted midway by Onagawa Town, this is the longest continuous section in one municipality. Kesenuma has Karakuwa, warm and close to the sea, Oshima Island which was once only accessed by Oshima Ferry, Kesenuma city center which prospered from the fishing industry, and Motoyoshi close to the

mountains and which prospered from mining.

This region has limited coastal area. The MCT route often meets up with National Route 45 which also stretches north to south, and the Hamakaido (Kesendo) route. While the road walking distance is long at 88 kilometers, the route has natural trails from Ogama to the Karakuwa Peninsula Visitor Center in Karakuwa Peninsula, and also in southern Oshima Island.

Reach Karakuwa Peninsula, and next is a 19 kilometer walk along the peninsula. Karakuwa Peninsula resembles Hirota Peninsula, only with a broader central ridge, and houses in a wide area from the center to the east bank, giving a



tidier sightseeing/neighborhood feel. Keep an eye out for splendid houses known as Karakuwa palaces: a unique aspect of Karakuwa with its many deep-sea fishermen. Kesenuma Port is a designated major fishing port, and a hub for deep-sea fishing.

There is a hiking course from Ogama Hanzo to Karakuwa Peninsula Visitor center which is mostly the same as the Miyagi Olle Kesenuma Karakuwa course and meets up with the MCT in many spots. Expect not to go down much to the seashore, instead walking along a well lit natural course for around seven kilometers atop cliffside which has ups and downs but is well maintained and easy to walk.

Pass Karakuwa Peninsula Visitor Center to reach the western side of the peninsula and you should be able to see Oshima Island across the Karakuwa Strait. 18 kilometers of the MCT is on Oshima Island. Those coming back to hike the island later because of weather or other reasons can take the Miyako Bus from Kesenuma Station to “Uranohama Kesenuma Oshima Welcome Terminal.” When the MCT was first opened, the Kesenuma Oshima Island bridge hadn’t been built yet, so hikers took the Oshima Ferry and started their hike from what was Uranohama Harbor. Now this ferry boarding area is a “Welcome Terminal” which serves as a place to rest, eat light meals, and buy souvenirs. Instead of hiking clockwise, going to the welcome terminal to gather info at the start of your walk might be a good idea.

The view over Oshima Strait from Ohashi Bridge is spectacular. Next is going up Mt. Kameyama, a small mountain. At Mt. Kameyama Viewing Point, enjoy a panoramic view of Oshima Island and Karakuwa Strait from 235 meters.

In Kesenuma city center, you will also go up Mt. Anbasan, and then come back down next to city hall, following the Hamakaido route. The MCT then turns left off the Hamakaido and goes through Kesenuma Port. Enjoy modern port city energy at Kesenuma Port Oshima Ferry Boarding Terminal, home to Exchange Plaza Pier 7 and Radio Kesenuma Gyotto FM’s studio. It’s a 17 kilometer road walk from Kesenuma Shark Museum to Oya Beach. Go





along Kesenuma Bay and head for Matsuzaki Osaki Bosai Park near BRT Matsuiwa Station.

If you want to see historical Kesenuma streets, take a right after you come down from Mt. Anbasan towards Kesenuma Station to go from Komachi and pass through Keshozaka's historical inn town area. Follow prefectural road 26 to the northeast to meet up with the MCT route again. The official route follows the Hamakaido route south from Matsuzaki Osaki.

Motoyoshi stopping by the gold mine

Reach Oya Beach, and on the other side of the road is "Michinoeki (Roadside Station) Oya Kaigan" which gets many visitors for its shops and because it also serves as BRT Oya Kaigan Station's waiting room. Besides shops, there are cafes and places to buy snacks, with a great view of Oya Beach. Hikers may have a hard time tearing themselves away.

Next, head toward Oya Mine Remains. Here the buildings from Oya Mine, which was in operation until 1976, remained preserved just as they were. The ria-style peaks from Kesen area all the way to Kinkasan Island were said to yield gold, so the entire view from Mt. Tatsugane is said to have been gold country. This Sanriku Coast is also the gold coast.

The MCT route goes through central Motoyoshi-cho. Outside the nostalgic Showa-style shopping district is supermarket Maiya Motoyoshi Hanamasu Store. Note you will be unable to buy supplies for 32 kilometers south of Motoyoshi as you go through Mt. Tatsugane and enter the Shizugawa area of Minamisanriku Town, so make sure to stock up here.

Crossing the watershed at Mount Tatsugane

The peak of Mt. Tatsugane is also the border between Kesenuma City and Minamisanriku Town, but even before that it would only have taken going past the Sanriku Expressway to enter Utatsu, Minamisanriku. Minamisanriku Town is the land of water and mountains. The ridges that surround Minamisanriku Town to form a watershed are the birthplace of several rivers including Hachiman River, Mizusiri River and the majority of rainfall ends up in Shizugawa Bay.

Even now, the four areas of Minamisanriku have their own particular personality, and the MCT goes through all of them. At 38 kilometers, Minamisanriku's section is shorter but is regarded as being tougher. About 28 kilometers are the approach to and from Mt. Tatsugane, about as far as with Mt. Hashikamidake. The sparse number of places to restock outside Shizugawa adds to the challenge. Plan to take your time and take lots of breaks, and the lush forest and ocean of Sanriku will welcome you.

The main MCT route goes towards Hinokuchi. After a pleasant walk through Hinokuchi's village and about one kilometer of logging road is the entrance to Gyoja no Michi, the path up the mountain. Take it slow and Gyoja no Michi will be easy to walk. Mt. Tatsugane is not as steep as the mountains to the north.





Miyagi Prefecture

Kesennuma City

Minamisanriku Town



Shizugawa Bay, a Ramsar Convention Wetland

Come down from Mt. Tatsugane and away from Utatsu area to enter Iriya. Lodging facility Minamisanriku Manabi no Sato Iriyado is along the MCT course. Stay here, and you won't have to worry about hiking without a full stomach, and Minamisanriku's scenery will look that much brighter.

Getting to Minamisanriku San San Shopping Area in Shizugawa means taking a left at the mouth of Mizushiri River and crossing Hachiman River from Fukko Kinen Park. Go north a little up the national route and there's a drugstore and supermarket. There are no large stores past Shizugawa until after Mt. Ishinaga and reaching Onagawa Station. Restocking options are very limited in Kitakami and Ogatsu along the way. Best to stock up on tasty treats as well as regular backpacking food.

Enter the Tokura area and pass Minamisanriku Marine Visitor Center to reach Cape Kamiwarizaki at the border of Minamisanriku Town. Walk for a while mostly staying off of but remaining close to National Route 398, visiting the fishing harbors at each small bay on the way. At the tip of Cape Kamiwarizaki is the border between Tokura, Minamisanriku Town and Kitakamicho-Jusanhama, Ishinomaki City.

Jyusan-hama, the natural scenery and village landscape of the Kitakami River

Ishinomaki City has the longest distance to walk of all the 29 municipalities the MCT goes through, at 125km. Ishinomaki grew in size when nearby

towns merged together, but each former village it contains has its own personality and way of life. Beginning at Cape Kamiwarizaki is the first such former village of Kitakamicyo-Jusanhama.

The MCT route returns to National Route 398 and follows a simple 15km road walk from Cape Kamiwarizaki to Shinkitakami Bridge. As you enter Oppa Bay, Shirahama Swimming Area offers a nice place to rest, and the beach is close by.

Approach Shirahama village and enter the mouth of the Kitakami River. The Kitakami area's culture is river culture. The 250 kilometer Kitakami River is the longest river in Tohoku, and ends its long journey to pour out into the Oppa Bay.

The Ishinomaki River Visitor Center's picnic area is just right for taking a break. Tsurishi Shrine is popular with students before taking exams because of its huge stone balanced without falling (falling). On the premises is Karaage Kokkoya, a karaage (fried chicken) shop that is popular with hikers for its karaage bentos and friendly owner. In front of Oppa Bridge and next to Maruyama Jizo statue is Nikkori Shop, decorated with its own jizo statue. It's an important business to this area, as it sells bentos and groceries.

Cross Oppa Bridge to enter Hashiura area, and then cross Kitakami River at Shinkitakami Bridge to reach Jusanhama. Here marks the end of the Kitakami area, and the end of the former Motoyoshi region which encompassed an area which started in Kesenuma.





Sakanokai Pass

Utatsu St.

Minamisanriku Town

Hikoro no Sato

Minamisanriku Sun Sun Shopping Village

Shizugawa St.

Shizugawa Bay

Minamisanriku Marine Visitor Center

Kamiwarizaki

Miyagi Prefecture

Ishinomaki Riverside Visitor Center

Shirahama Beach

Oppa Bay

Tsurijishi Shrine

Kitakami Town

Shin-Kitakami Ohashi Bridge

Nagatsuraura

Kitakami River

Kahoku Town

Ogatsu Fishing Harbor

Ogatsu Town

Ishinomaki City

Mt. Kenjo

Ogatsu Bay

Ogatsu Pass

Mt. Ishinage



Landscape of the Trail

Ogatsu → Higashi-Matsushima

While this southernmost part of the Kitakami Mountains is part of the wider economic area centered in Ishinomaki City and close to urban Sendai, it stoutly retains a way of life close to nature. If this area were a story, it would be split into three chapters. The first is the Pacific coast from Kitakami River to Onagawa. The second is the path to Kinkasan Island with Oshika Peninsula and the Oshika Islands. The third is the Mono district area centered around Kyu-Kitakami River and Ishinomaki's Minato area situated in the west Kitakami Mountains. This section has a lot of road walking, making over 40km of progress in a day possible, but let's take a slower pace to absorb the 180km of this vast area.

The 15 villages of Ogatsu stretching along the peninsula

As the MCT leaves Kahoku Area and Shinkitakami Bridge and enters Ogatsu, it mostly faithfully follows prefectural road 238 to venture deeper into Ogatsu Bay. This will be a long journey of about 36km, so many will need to stay overnight somewhere along the way. With villages in each beach area, there are some bed and breakfasts around. Meanwhile, the Ogatsu area is about 80% forest and there are houses in those flat areas along the coast,

so there are fewer places suitable for camping than you might think. Those worried about a place to sleep should check with the guest house for hikers "m.s.s.books" in Ogatsu Town. The owner is a MCT thru-hiker and should be helpful, including possibly providing rides to lodging.

Waiting after this long road walk is Michinoeki (roadside station) Kenjonosato Ogatsu in the Ogatsu area, with local restaurants, coffee shops, grocery shops and more. These shops are only open during the day, so plan your arrival time accordingly.





Kitakami Town
Jusanhama

Tsurishi Shrine

*Miyagi
Prefecture*

Shin-Kitakami
Ohashi Bridge

Nagatsuraura

Kitakami River

Kenjo no Sato
Ogatsu

Osu Fishing Harbor

Osusaki Lighthouse

Ishinomaki City

Ogatsu
Fishing Harbor

Mt. Kenjo

Ogatsu Bay

Ogatsu Pass

Namiita Coast

Mt. Ishinage

Onagawa Town

Onagawa St.

4:9

Izushima

Mangokuura

Mt. Dairokuten

Momonoura

Samuraihama

Oginohama

Fukkiura

Oshika Peninsula

Kyubunhama

Kugunarihama





Ishinomaki City

Mt. Kenjo

Mizuhama

Ogatsu Bay

Miyagi Prefecture

Ogatsu Pass

Wakehama

Namiita Coast

Mt. Ishinage

Anotaira

Okushimizu Keiryu no Mori

Onagawa Town

Onagawa St.

49

Mangokuura

Kazakoshi Pass

Mt. Dairokuten

Oginohama Elementary School

Momonoura

Samuraihama

Oginohama

Kozumi Pass

Fukkiura

Koamikura Fishing Harbor

Oshika Peninsula

Kyubunhama

Kugunarihama

Ishi Pass

Ayukawa Fishing Harbor

Ayukawa

Koganeyama Shrine

Tashirojima Island

Oshika Peninsula Visitor Center

Kinkasan Island

Ajishima Island

427

890

1043

There are two ways to Mt. Ishinage: the main route, and the detour. The main route doesn't go further east after Michinoeki Kenjonosato Ogatsu, instead following a logging road for a long while. Go through prefectural road 192 Ishinomaki Ogatsu Route and head for Ogatsu Pass. After entering Mt. Kenjo trailhead and going through Ogatsu Pass, take the trail up Mt. Ishinage to aim for the summit.

The mountain road over Ogatsu Pass, or the coastal road along Namita Beach

Near Ogatsu Pass is the highest peak in the Ogatsu area, Mt. Kenjo (519 meters), which is easy to reach from the trailhead at 350 meters and offers a view of Oshika Peninsula, Kinkasan Island and Minamisanriku from its spacious summit. Annodaira, the place that gave Onagawa its name, is also nearby. From Annodiara, pass down through Okushimizu Keiryu no Mori, which is a camping area, to reach Onagawa Station area.

On the other hand, the detour route to Mt. Ishinage offers a chance to enjoy an oceanside route that turns into deep forest. Cross Funado Bridge to go through Mizuhama and Bunhama before reaching Namiita Beach. Go up a road wide enough for horses, and make a wide turn right at a three-way point at 381.2 meters elevation. The ridgeline is the border between Ishinomaki City and Onagawa Town. As the peak of Mt. Ishinage grows closer, a trail going along the mountain to the right will appear. This is where the detour meets up with the regular route. Aim for the peak to finish your detour.



The top of Mt. Ishinage (455 meters) is spacious and the views are good as well.

The short 15 kilometers in Onagawa Town is like a rollercoaster, with Mt. Ishinage on one side, Mt. Dairokuten (439 meters) on the other side, and Onagawa city center in the middle. Even strong-legged hikers who try to pass through Onagawa Station at a brisk pace may find that they end up spending more time than intended, as the area hosts a sightseeing wharf, shopping area Seapal Pier Onagawa, supermarket Onmaeya, and Yuppopo, a hot springs inside Onagawa Station. Better plan to spend some time here.

The Great Nature of the Oshika Peninsula

After Onagawa town center is the hike to the top of Mt. Dairokuten. There are spacious grassy areas on the ridges where the trees have been cut down, and lots of spots offering nice views of the area as a result. Enjoy well lit hiking offering better views than Mt. Ishinage.

Follow along Mangokuura Bay to reenter Ishinomaki City, gazing at the lovely bay as you walk before entering the road toward Kinkasan Island, traveling south to reach Ayukawa. Ayukawa is the southernmost village area in Oshika Peninsula, where the ferry to Kinkasan Island departs.

There are four passes on the route towards Kinkasan Island. The first pass is Kazakoshi Pass, which has the Kazakoshi Tunnel going through it. The MCT takes the tunnel. The second pass is Okoshi Pass which starts at Oginohama Elementary School going along a

natural path beside a river. This part is less than 2 kilometers long but has lovely valley scenery.

Enter Kozumihama to see the third pass, Kozumihama Pass, a natural path with beautiful cedar forest. The Kinkasan Island pilgrimage route was also an everyday use road for residents, so it was built to be easy to walk. The last pass to Kinkasan Island, Ishi Pass, has a lower elevation at 70 meters and the area along the pass is paved.

Cruising the Oshika Islands by Boat—Kinkasan, Aji Island, Tashiro Island

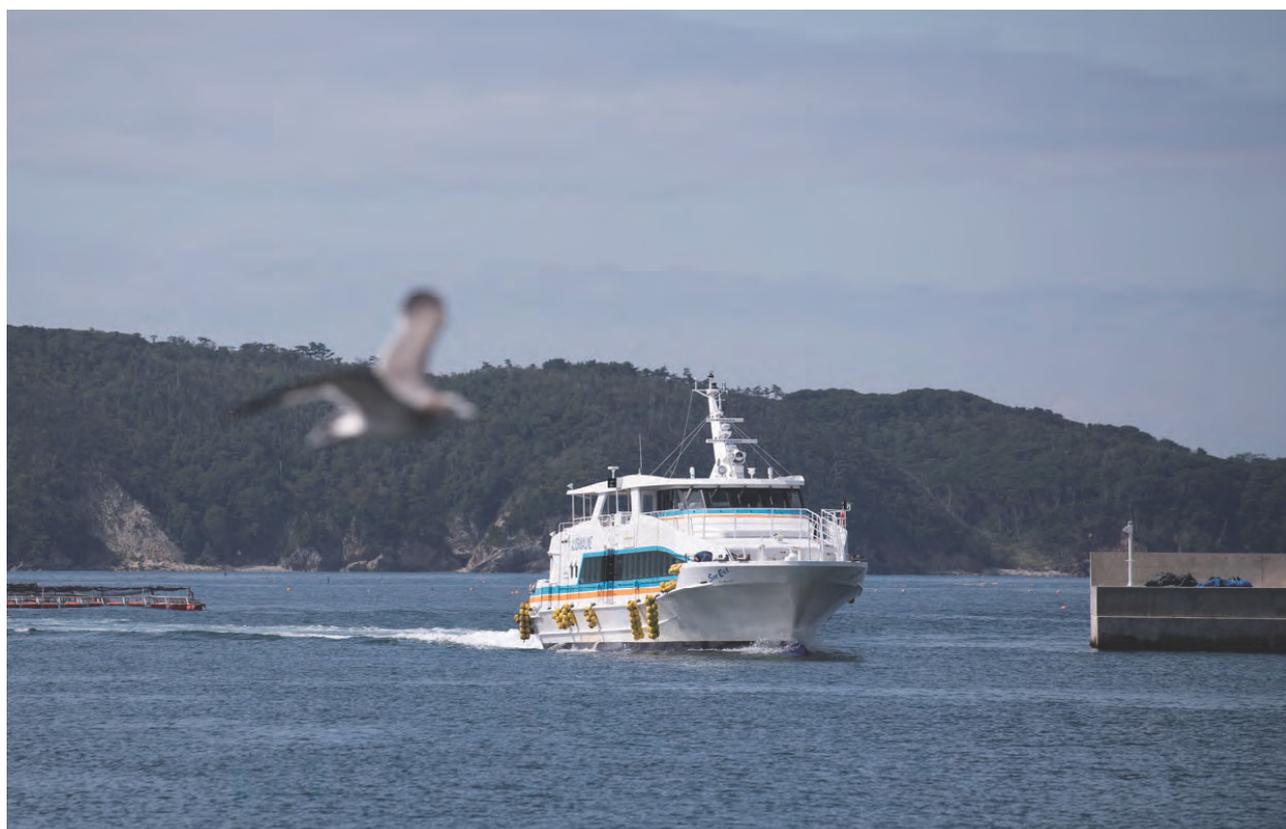
Koganeyama Shrine is historically known as one of the three sacred spots in northern Japan, and Kinkasan Island was said to have produced gold in the Edo period. In 1979, Kinkasan Island was designated as part of Minamisanriku-Kinkazan Quasi-National Park along with Oshika Islands Ajishima Island and Tashirojima Island and Minamisanriku Town's coastline. Then, in 2015 it was designated as part of Sanriku Fukko National Park.

Access to Kinkasan is available via boats departing from Ayukawa Port and Onagawa

Port. Please check the operating hours. One possible good idea is coming back to pray at Kinka Island's shrine to give thanks after walking the entire MCT. Considering that if you "come to pray here three years in a row, you'll never worry about money," it might be best to make a visit happen.

Return to Ayukawa Port and take the Ajishima line to Ajishima Island, Tashirojima Island, and then Ishinomaki city proper. As you approach Ishinomaki's mainland from the ferry, you'll see low mountains-like bumps, which is where the city lies stretched out over flat plains. Alight at the Kyu-Kitakami River and its surrounding drainage basin, the Senboku Plain.

The Ajishima Line ferry from Tashirojima Island stops at Ishinomaki Port Kadonowaki and the Ishinomaki Central Terminal. To follow the MCT course, get off at the Chuo ferry terminal and go along Kyu-Kitakami river. Meanwhile, get off at Kadonowaki to visit the Minamihama area. This area was catastrophically damaged in the 2011 tsunami and has Ishinomaki Minamihama Tsunami Memorial Park and Tsunami Monument Kadonowaki Elementary School.



Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture's second-largest city

The MCT travels up Kyu-Kitakami River, or former Kitakami River, where the Kitakami River originally flowed. From the Edo period to the Meiji period, the Kitakami River was vital to water transport and Ishinomaki Minato at the river mouth was a maritime transport hub. The trade from these two vectors put together made Ishinomaki extraordinarily prosperous, with many traces of that legacy to see in Ishinomaki, but the MCT route mainly passes through a cycling road and the Kitakami Canal, so there's limited chance to see more of Ishinomaki's culture and way of life.

A small park along Kyu-Kitakami River contains the origin of Ishinomaki's name, Makiishi Rock. From Kyu-Kitakami River, enter the Kitakami Canal and from the canal continue along the embankment of Jogawa River. The 125 kilometers of walking in Ishinomaki City will end on a road without any clear border indicating



you've entered Higashi-Matsushima City.

Higashi-Matsushima, crossing the site of the former Nobiru Port

Cross the Jogawa River and you're in the Yamoto area of Higashi-Matsushima City. Move out of the residential area and to the southern portion of Kitakami Canal and it's 6.5 kilometers of straight



walking next to the JASDF Matsushima Air Base. Cross Hamaichi Bridge, and the open area shown as Toba on the map is where the town along the Nobiru Port Site was once planned to be built.

The Nobiru Port was a major Meiji-period project that was meant to connect the main transportation and trading network of the time between Kitakami River, Shiogama Port and Abukuma River. If the port had been successfully completed, it would have been the first international port before Yokohama, but damage from a typhoon brought the project to a deadlock. As trade via the train lines started, Nobiru Port became a site of unachieved dreams. Look for the brick bridge abutment at Naruse River, which was part of the project.

Go under Naruse-Ohashi bridge, turn right, and then go up to cross the bridge. The flat and sometimes monotonous Senboku Plain ends here, and the Matsushima Hills begin.



Geography and Vegetation Map — Northern Miyagi





The peninsula formed at the southern Ria coastline and the mouth of Kitakami River

The southern end of the Sanriku Ria Coast

This zone's coastline is also characterized by deep inlets forming the Sanriku Ria Coast. Beginning around Miyako and extending all the way to the Oshika Peninsula, the Sanriku Coast transitions from coastal terraces in northern Iwate to a ria coastline in the south. What's the difference? The fault lines in southern Iwate, where the Sanriku Ria Coast is observed, run from north-northwest to south-southeast, whereas the coastline curves southwest at a steep angle. The fault lines have eroded, leading to the development of valleys that are relatively perpendicular to the sea. When sea levels rose after the end of the Ice Age, seawater entered these valleys, forming the inlets. In the northern parts, fewer valleys lead to the sea, and the rate of uplift of the land was faster.

The southern part of Iwate, roughly south of a line connecting Kamaishi to Morioka, has Nambu Kitakami Belt, consisting of geological strata from

approximately 500 to 200 million years ago. Around 400 million years ago, parts of the vast Gondwana supercontinent, which was located in the southern hemisphere at the time, including accretionary bodies, shifted to their present positions. This area is a relic of ancient times, where fossils of marine and coastal flora and fauna are also found.

Oshika Peninsula and Oshika Islands

The Oshika Peninsula is located at the southern end of the extension of the Kitakami Mountains. The surrounding area is one of the regions with the highest number of islands among the ria coasts. Among them, Kinkasan stands out as the largest, and it is revered as a sacred site along with Osorezan and the Three Mountains of Dewa, collectively known as the Three Spiritual Places of Oshu (Tohoku region). Other than priests, there are no residents there. The second largest island is Ajishima Island, which is known for its long history as seen in Jomon pottery found there. Similar to the Oshika Peninsula,





Matsushima Bay was formed by the rise in sea levels during the most recent interglacial period. At the entrance of the bay, there are numerous small islands such as Miyato Island, Kanpuzawa Island, Nonoshima Island, Katsurajima Island, among others, creating a diverse archipelago. During the last glacial period approximately 10,000 years ago, these islands were part of the mainland beyond the current coastline.

Kitakami River, the largest river in Tohoku

The area in between the Oshika Peninsula and Matsushima is Ishinomaki. It is located on a delta developed at the mouth of the largest river in Tohoku, the Kitakami River. The Kitakami River flows straight south through the Kitakami Basin, situated between the Kitakami Mountains and the Ou Mountain Range. Its source is around halfway between Morioka and Ichinohe, near the northern part of Iwate Town, and its total length from the source to the mouth is 249 km. Almost all major cities in the inland areas of the prefecture developed along this river. Various products from within the prefecture, including rice, were transported to Ishinomaki via the Kitakami River's water transport and then farther to Sendai and Edo (Tokyo today). The historical Oshu Kaido route extends along the Kitakami River from Ichinoseki to the north, forming a major artery of transportation in Iwate, combining both water and land routes. While the Kitakami Mountains are composed of hard geological formations originating from ancient continents, the Ou Mountain Range consists of softer geological formations created by later uplifts and volcanic eruptions. Therefore, sediment tends to accumulate on the right bank of the Kitakami River, on the side of the Ou Mountain Range, causing the river to develop as if being pushed by the Kitakami Mountains side,

and there are many major tributaries on the Ou Mountain Range side.

The mouth of the Kitakami River was originally a floodplain with an undefined course; therefore, flood control and channel relocation have been carried out since the time of Date Masamune. The river course, originally merging into the Hazama River in the northern part of Tome, was dammed up to prevent flooding in Tome by diverting it to the Futamata River. Later, to enhance the water transport of the Kitakami River, the Kitakami River, Hazama River, and Eai River were merged to secure a route to Ishinomaki. However, flooding occurred upstream from the confluence point. Since the Meiji era,

most of the flow has been diverted to the Oshika River (formerly known as Oppa River), and that part has been renamed as the Kitakami River. The former Kitakami River passes through the city of Ishinomaki. As a result, a rational flood control system was completed, diverting the mainstream away from Ishinomaki toward the other side of the Oshika Peninsula while ensuring a shipping route from the upstream to Ishinomaki.

A Bay with a Rich Nature

Shizugawa Bay, facing Minamisanriku Town, was registered as a Ramsar Convention wetland in 2018. The coastal area of Minamisanriku is characterized by the unique convergence of warm currents (Kuroshio) and cold currents (Oyashio). As a result, Shizugawa Bay harbors a rare seaweed bed where wakame, which grows in warm waters, and ma-konbu, which grows in cold waters, coexist, creating a globally unique, rich ecosystem. This environment supports a diverse range of species, including endangered species such as the black-faced spoonbill, white-tailed eagle, and Steller's sea eagle, which gather here for wintering.

Adjacent to Shizugawa Bay to the south is the Oppa Bay. Here, abundant plankton carried by the Kitakami River attract fish and shellfish, which in turn attract birds, creating another rich natural ecosystem. Nagatsura Bay is a tidal flat lake where seaweed and oysters are cultivated extensively. The warm-temperate plant community on Hakkeijima Island at the mouth of the bay, including camellias and Japanese blue oaks, is designated as a natural monument. The area is also famous for its fishing grounds.



Over 1,200 plant species from both southern and northern limits

The rich flora that adorns the Ria coastline

The northern coast of Miyagi Prefecture stretches from the Karakuwa Peninsula to the Oshika Peninsula, featuring a complex, indented Ria coastline. This area marks south end of the Sanriku Fukko National Park and is relatively well-preserved.

Compared to inland areas, the climate is cooler and more humid in summer and warmer and drier in winter. Along the rocky shores, sun-loving forests of red pine and black pine have formed. In sunny spots sheltered from winds, evergreen broadleaf tabunoki (Japanese blue oaks) forests grow naturally.

On the cliff slopes, herbaceous communities such as beach daisies, sea lilies, sea holly, and beach buckthorn can be seen, along with shrub communities including Japanese spindle trees, Japanese privets, Japanese boxwoods, and Japanese holly.

Kinkasan Island, where pristine nature remains, and Tsubakijima Island (Minamisanriku Town) and Yakekijima Island (Ogatsu Town), designated as national natural monuments, are home to lush growths of warm-climate plants that would normally struggle to thrive naturally along the Tohoku coastline.

Karakuwa Peninsula

The Karakuwa Peninsula, characterized by inlets like Oogama, Oreishi, and Hanzou, boasts cliffs and rock formations. At its entrance, the “Shimo-Nihon-Sugi” cedar trees (Miyagi natural treasure), over 300 years old, welcome visitors. At the southern tip, famous for its sea-eroded terraces, the “Osaki” area offers seasonal plants to enjoy from its promenade. Cold-climate plants like beach rose and nikko-kisuge coexist with warm-climate species such as tabunoki (Japanese blue oaks) and camellias. Particularly within the grounds of Misaki Shrine, a dense tabunoki forest thrives.

Motoyoshi

The earthquake and tsunami impacted the natural environment, eroding Pacific coast beaches through land subsidence and tsunami waves, and washing away coastal forests and vegetation. The Tsuya River estuary, which retains tidal flats and wetlands, was one such area. During restoration work on the damaged river and coastal levees, new wetlands and tidal flats were created. This aims to preserve habitats for flora and fauna.



Mountain azaleas



“Gyoiko”cherry

Kitakami

The Kitakami River estuary, renowned as a reed bed habitat, also suffered significant damage due to the earthquake. While the reed beds were reduced by half, efforts by residents and NPOs, combined with ground uplift, have restored nearly 40% of the lost area over 11 years. Transplanting of plants like beach rose, **beach dianthus**, and sea holly, which declined or disappeared due to the disaster, is also underway.

Ooshima

The largest island in the Tohoku region, floating in Kesenuma Bay, it is also called the “Green Pearl.” In spring, Japanese camellias bloom, and from the summit of Mt. Kameyama (elevation 235m), visitors can enjoy views of the island adorned with the “**Gyoiko**” **cherry blossoms**. The island also features stands of red oak, evergreen broadleaf tree at its northernmost limit.

Mt. Tatsugane

Mt. Tatsugane (elevation 512m), long revered as a sacred mountain in mountain worship traditions, is also famous as a prime viewing spot for **mountain azaleas**. Approximately 50,000 azaleas grow wild near the summit, transforming the entire area into a fiery crimson during their early summer bloom. The oldest known specimens are estimated to be around 200 years old. It forms an exclave within the Sanriku Fukko National Park.

Shizugawa Bay

This area serves as a wintering ground for the endangered Spot-billed Duck and was designated a Ramsar Site in 2018. It features well-developed seaweed beds including **eelgrass beds**, kelp beds, arame beds, and galamo beds. A distinctive feature is the coexistence of cold-water kelp and warm-water arame. Immediately after the disaster, the seagrass beds shrank significantly, but they have been gradually recovering.

Tsubaki-shima Island, floating within Shizugawa Bay, is almost entirely covered by primary forests of tabunoki trees and is also called “Aoshima.” Numerous plants, such as Japanese holly and Asuka swordfern, for which Shizugawa Bay marks the northernmost limit, can also be found here.

Oshika Peninsula, Kinkasan Island

Here too, cold-tolerant and warm-climate plants vie for dominance. The Oshika Peninsula features many fir forests; on its highest peak, Mt. Hikari (443m), firs grow mixed with beeches. Along the coast, warm-temperate deciduous broadleaf forests like Korean hornbeam forests appear, while steep slopes host red hornbeam forests. Furthermore, on Kinkasan Island, covered in primary forest, a remarkable vertical distribution was once evident: beech and red pine forests above 200m elevation, with fir and Korean hornbeam forests growing below. However, in recent years, the presence of Japanese deer inhabiting the area has led to increasing vegetation divergence and bare ground formation.



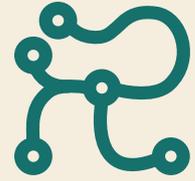
Reed beds along the Kitakami River



Beach dianthus



Eelgrass beds



Towns that have been trading hubs and landing points for fisheries

Fishing towns along the southern Sanriku Ria Coast

The Sanriku Ria Coast is dotted with towns developed from fishing villages nestled in inlets and bays. Along the southern part of the Sanriku Ria Coast, the towns are Kesenuma facing Kesenuma Bay, Minamisanriku, which faces Shizugawa Bay (a town that came into being by merger of Shizugawa, Utatsu, and Tokura), Kitakami Town Jusanhama facing Oppa Bay, Ogatsu with the Ogatsu Bay; and Onagawa with the Onagawa Bay. Onagawa is located right at the base of the Oshika Peninsula. Beyond the coast are towns along the Oshika Peninsula, where fishing villages have also emerged in the inlets and bays. The eastern side of the peninsula faces the Pacific Ocean, while the western side faces Sendai Bay. Due to the presence of large ports such as Ishinomaki and Shiogama on the western side, which connect to Sendai and Edo (Tokyo), the towns on the western side of the Oshika Peninsula have prospered. From the tip of the peninsula, including Ayukawa, Kobuchihama, and Hagihama, fishing villages line the inlets, which have been active fishing grounds for a long time. Ayukawa, in particular, has a history of active whaling since ancient times. This area has the highest concentration of inlets and islands along the Sanriku Ria Coast, with many rocky reefs, making it an especially rich fishing ground along the coast.

Ishinomaki, the largest fishing port in the Tohoku region

The second most populous city in Miyagi Prefecture, Ishinomaki is located just west of the scattered settlements on the Oshika Peninsula. In fact, due to recent mergers, Ishinomaki City now encompasses Jusanhama, Jusanhama, Ogatsu, and most of Oshika Peninsula. Positioned at the mouth of the Kitakami River, the largest river in Tohoku, Ishinomaki historically thrived as a hub for shipping boats from major towns along the Kitakami River. During the Edo period, rice from Hachinohe Domain, Morioka Domain, and Ichinoseki Domain was consolidated here before being transported to Sendai and Edo. Known historically as Oshikano Minato, it was also referred to as Ijino Minato or Ishino Minato, which

is said to be the origin of the name Ishinomaki. During the Edo period, the East Sea Route was developed, connecting Sakata on the Sea of Japan side to Choshi and Edo via the Tsugaru Strait, with large ships stopping at Ishinomaki and Arahama (at the mouth of the Abukuma River) on their way south. Ishinomaki is a city of maritime trade and fishing. It is designated as a Specific Third-Class Fishing Port, one of thirteen such ports nationwide, capable of accommodating nationwide use. Among these ports, four are located in the Sanriku region, including Kesenuma, Hachinohe, Shiogama, and Ishinomaki. Ishinomaki boasts the highest volume of fish landings among the four.





Kesenuma: Building an Industrial Foundation on Bonito

Since ancient times, Kesenuma was a coastal community with excellent “fish gathering” conditions, as fish have gathered in the brackish waters of the river mouth to spawn. It attracted not only fish but also the boats of fishermen pursuing them, giving rise to new technologies and cultures.

In 1675, when a fleet of pole-and-line bonito fishing boats from Kishu (Wakayama Prefecture) operated off the Sanriku coast, Kan’emon Suzuki, the head of an old family in Shibitachi, Karakuwa (northern Kesenuma), welcomed five boats and approximately 70 crew members. By learning the pole-and-line fishing method from them, the history of Kesenuma’s bonito fishing – which now boasts the highest catch volume in Japan – began.

Until then, bonito fishing in Sanriku was waiting for the fish to come close to the shore in autumn. However, the pole-and-line method using live sardines as bait extended the fishing season and dramatically increased the catch volume. Kan’emon Suzuki spread this method throughout the territory of the Sendai domain.

The caught bonito was processed into katsuobushi (dried bonito) and sent to Edo (Tokyo) and other areas. Sardine fishing also flourished to supply bait, and during the winter when there was no bonito fishing, sardines were primarily processed into shimekasu (fish meal fertilizer).

Boats that operated as bonito vessels from spring to autumn were used for tuna longline fishing in the winter. By the late Edo period, the main fish species in Kesenuma were bonito, tuna, and squid. The motorization of fishing boats progressed around the end of the Meiji era.

After World War II, the modernization of ships combined with the government’s encouragement of pelagic fishing led to further enlargement of vessels dedicated to tuna fishing. The luxurious Japanese-style houses built by Kesen carpenters for fishermen who made their fortunes in pelagic fishing are called Karakuwa Palaces or Tuna Palaces.

Ayukawa: The Whaling Town

The Oshika Peninsula, once a chain of peaceful semi-agricultural, semi-fishing villages, underwent a dramatic change after the late Meiji era. It began with the establishment of whaling as a major industry. The waters off Sanriku and Kinkasan are rich fishing grounds and a hot spot where whales gather. Until the early Meiji era, locals lacked whaling technology and considered it lucky if a whale stranded itself. However, in the late Meiji era, a whaling company from Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture—the only one in Japan conducting modern whaling at the time – expanded into Ayukawa. With the introduction of American and Norwegian whaling techniques using powered vessels and lethal harpoon guns, Oshika became a hub for the



The Oshika Peninsula Visitor Center inside Whale Town OSHIKA, introducing the natural environment and local ways of life of the Oshika Peninsula area within Sanriku Fukko National Park.



Kinkasan Island as seen from the Oshika Peninsula. [Photo: Koji Iwama]

corporate-led whaling industry.

Since then, Ayukawa has been a corporate town for whaling. Fishery companies gathered there, and it bustled as the gateway for pilgrimages to Kinkasan, which were popular in the Meiji era. People migrated from afar seeking work, and shopping streets, town offices, and schools were established. In just a few decades, the town transformed into a modern city.

Ayukawa's prosperity peaked in the mid-1950s during the post-war reconstruction period. Whale meat became a vital source of animal protein after the war, greatly developing commercial whaling. Pelagic fishing by fishery companies with huge capital and large-scale fixed-net fishing also thrived, and Ayukawa entered a golden age fueled by the "whale boom." In addition to coastal whaling, expeditions to the Antarctic Ocean had been conducted since before the war and continued afterward. Even today, some homes in Ayukawa display stuffed penguins in their entryways or living rooms as mementos brought back from Antarctica by crew members of that era.

Management of marine resources became an international issue, and commercial whaling was temporarily suspended in 1986. Although whaling as an industry declined thereafter, commercial whaling has resumed following the Japanese government's withdrawal from the IWC, and attention is once again focusing on whale meat consumption as a regional culture and tourism resource. Whale Land Oshika, located in Ayukawahama, is the fifth iteration of the whale museum originally established before the war. Through extensive materials, including skeletal specimens of whales and the aforementioned stuffed penguins, it conveys the history and culture of whales and people in this region.

Reference: Ryuji Yamamoto, Oshika Hanto

ni okeru Hogeigyō no Hensen to Geiruishigen no Katsuyo (Changes in the whaling industry and the utilization of cetacean resources on the Oshika Peninsula)

The Waters off Kinkasan: One of the World's Three Great Fishing Grounds

The term "world's three great fishing grounds" refers to areas with an exceptionally high variety of fish species. The waters off Sanriku and Kinkasan are counted among them, alongside the waters off Norway and the Grand Banks off Newfoundland, Canada. A rich variety of seafood is landed here because the waters off Kinkasan are the collision zone of the Oyashio (cold current) and the Kuroshio (warm current), the intricate rias coastline and scattered islands provide excellent habitats for fish, and the constant flow of mountain water into the sea fosters the growth of phytoplankton. The area supports Japan's fishing industry with three prominent fishing ports nearby: Kesenuma, Ishinomaki, and Shiogama.

Fisheries have been operated on the Oshika Peninsula since ancient times, but most were small-scale, semi-agricultural, semi-fishing operations conducted in the isone (rocky coastal areas). In the Edo period, fishing boats from other regions, such as Kishu, advanced into this area aiming for the prime fishing grounds. While this created competition for resources, it also introduced new fishing techniques and new industries like dried bonito production. From the Meiji era onward, whaling developed into a major industry using technology acquired from overseas, and the area became a base for pelagic fishing and large-scale fixed-net fishing.

Today, the waters off Kinkasan still yield sea urchin, abalone, bonito, flounder, greenling, hijiki, and mekabu seaweed. Aquaculture for oysters, sea squirts, scallops, and wakame seaweed is also thriving. The opening day of the abalone fishing season, known as *kuchiake*, is a significant local event. Blessed with diverse seafood in every season, one can feel the changing of the year at the dinner table. It can truly be said that marine products shape the regional culture.

Ogatsu Stone: A Natural Material for Traditional Crafts with a 600-Year History

The dome roofs of the Tokyo Station Marunouchi Building, restored to their original appearance in 2012, use natural slate made of Ogatsu stone. In the Ogatsu district, the production site, the tsunami from the Great East Japan Earthquake washed away over 60,000 slates that had been stored there for repair work on Tokyo Station. Despite suffering immense damage, stakeholders and collaborators spent two weeks collecting the slates and delivered 40,000 reusable pieces.

The Ogatsu district in Ishinomaki is the production site for Ogatsu stone, the raw material for inkstones (suzuri) and natural slate. It is a hard black slate found in geological strata from 200 to 300 million years ago. Resistant to compression and bending, and with low water absorption, it resists deterioration over many years. Ogatsu inkstones made from this stone are designated Traditional Craft of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. Their origin is said to date back to the Muromachi period, and there is an anecdote from the Edo period that they caught the eye of Lord Masamune Date, who bestowed a reward for them.

Preserving techniques and traditions passed down through 600 years of history, raw stones quarried from the mountains are carved into inkstones by skilled hands at local processing workshops.

Ogatsu stone is not only resistant to aging but also has excellent waterproof and fireproof properties, making it highly in demand as a building material. Because the particles are uniform, possess a luster, have a smooth and elegant jet-black surface, and split into thin layers, the stone is primarily used as roofing material. Due to its sense of presence and high quality, it has been used to roof cultural properties and historic buildings across the country since the Meiji era.

While facing challenges such as recovery from the tsunami and a shortage of successors, modern Ogatsu stone products – such as tableware and flower vases that have newly entered production – are being highly evaluated both in Japan and abroad.



Thin stone plates made from Ogatsu Stone.



The Tokyo Station Marunouchi Building, restored using Ogatsu Stone slate for its roof.



Reed fields spreading across the estuary of the Kitakami River, the largest river in the Tohoku region. [Photo: Satoko Shibahara]

Kesenuma's Naiwan: a "Wind-Waiting" Port

During the Edo period, the Naiwan (Inner Bay) district at the back of Kesenuma Port flourished as a hub of port town culture because many sailing ships entered the port to wait for the northwesterly wind suitable for setting sail. Due to the terrain that channels the wind, the town was destroyed by major fires twice, in the Taisho and Showa eras, but was revived through reconstruction work by Kesen carpenters and others.

Although many historic buildings in this district were lost to the tsunami of the Great East Japan Earthquake, momentum grew to rebuild this Wind-Waiting Area. Six Registered Tangible Cultural Properties damaged in the disaster were restored; for example, the Uomachi store of Otokoyama Honten, a sake brewery, was restored based on a surviving section.

Brackish Waters of the Kitakami River Mouth and the Thatching Industry

The Kitakami River, which flows from its source in Iwate Town, Iwate Prefecture, to Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, is the largest river in the Tohoku region. Due to large-scale construction work conducted in the Edo period for new field development and the

improvement of shipping routes, the river was divided downstream into the Kyu-Kitakami (Old Kitakami) River, which flows into Ishinomaki Bay, and the Kitakami River, which reaches Oppa Bay. The mouth of the Kitakami River, which has a vast width, is a brackish water area rich in nature, featuring one of the largest yoshi (reed) fields in Japan. Its majestic scenery can be called a primal landscape of Japan. The richness of nature is also an attraction; in 1996, the sound of reeds rustling in the wind was selected as one of the "100 Soundscapes of Japan We Want to Preserve," and the Ministry of the Environment has designated the area as a "wetland of high importance from the perspective of biodiversity." The area is home to many organisms unique to brackish waters, such as the corbicula clam (Yamato-shijimi) and the yellow bittern (yoshigo), an endangered bird species.

Reeds are primarily used as material for thatched roofs. Reeds from brackish waters are stronger than those from freshwater areas, boasting the highest quality in Japan. Until before the war, their main use was for the roofs of local houses, but due to the decline of thatching industry and the high quality of the reeds, they came to be used for temples, shrines, and cultural properties nationwide. Reed harvesting takes place annually from December to March and has become a winter tradition. In the Great East Japan Earthquake, the tsunami surged up the river, and combined with land subsidence, the reed fields were reduced from approximately 183 hectares

to about 87 hectares. However, thanks to the efforts of residents and volunteers in cleaning up debris carried by the tsunami and conducting transplant experiments to regenerate the fields, they are gradually recovering.

Taking to the Skies from Matsushima Air Base

Visible along the Kitakami Canal heading from Ishinomaki to Higashi-Matsushima is the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) Matsushima Air Base. This is the home base of Blue Impulse, the acrobatic flight team that performs air shows at aviation festivals and ceremonies across Japan. Blue Impulse specializes in public relations activities for the JASDF through exhibition flights showcasing advanced flying techniques. In recent memory, they performed appreciation flights for medical workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and created the Olympic rings in the sky during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Matsushima Air Base is responsible for the final stage of training for F-2 fighter pilots. Blue Impulse flight training can also be viewed from the area surrounding the base. At the Matsushima Air Base Air Festival held every year, visitors can fully enjoy impressive acrobatic flights from takeoff to landing. Because Blue Impulse aircraft have small fuel tanks and a short flight range, when performing

exhibition flights at events west of the Kansai region, they travel via stopovers such as Hamamatsu Air Base.

The Revival of Bathhouse Culture in Kesenuma in a New Form

Historically, port towns frequented by many fishing boats were always accompanied by sento (public bathhouses), red-light districts, confectionery shops, and fruit stores. Remnants of bathhouse culture still exist slightly in Miyako and Kesenuma. Tsurukame no Yu in Kesenuma is a sento loved by the community in a new form following the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Its predecessor was Kame no Yu, founded in 1886. Fishermen who entered Kesenuma to wait for the wind washed away their sweat there. Although it was damaged by the 2011 tsunami, it was revived with the support of volunteers; however, it was forced to evict for seawall construction, and closed in 2017.

A female business owner of Kesenuma and those who relocated to Kesenuma, driven by the desire to “create a port town that fishermen want to come back to,” raised funds through crowdfunding and opened a sento using a trailer house. They named it Tsurukame no Yu after the original Kame no Yu. The facility also includes a cafeteria and is engaged in supporting young people who aspire to become fishermen.



A T-4 training aircraft of the Blue Impulse aerobatic team performing a demonstration flight at an air festival. [Photo: Courtesy Higashi Matsushima City]



Faith and Festivals

Kinkasan: The Island of Faith Visited by Sanriku Fishermen by Boat

Floating off the coast of the Oshika Peninsula, Kinkasan (Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture) has long been an object of worship in its entirety and a sacred ground for Shugendo (mountain asceticism). Yamabushi (mountain ascetics) who trained here spread the Kinkasan faith to various regions.

According to the records of Kinkasan Koganeyama Shrine, enshrined in the northwestern part of the island, the shrine's history began in the Nara period when a deity of gold was enshrined to celebrate the first production of gold in Japan in the Mutsu province, the ancient name of this region.

The waters off Kinkasan are rich fishing grounds, but they were also known as a difficult point for navigation. Consequently, ships operating along the coast from Iwate to Fukushima steered using Kinkasan as a landmark. The island gathered faith as the



Kinkasan Koganeyama Shrine, where the entire island of Kinkasan is regarded as sacred. [Photo: Courtesy Ishinomaki City]

guardian of bountiful catches and safety at sea; it became a custom for coastal fishermen to travel to Kinkasan by boat at the beginning of the fishing season to have their tairyobata (big catch flags) purified.

The custom of pilgrimage to Kinkasan, known as Kinkasan-ko, spread to farming and mountain villages across the Tohoku region. The route from Sendai through Ishinomaki to the ports on the Oshika Peninsula and Kinkasan was called the Kinkasan Road, and the First Torii Gate still remains on the peninsula today.

Whale Meat Culture and Raw Minke Whale

In Ayukawa, a town that served as a whaling base, whale meat is a local cuisine. However, the culture of eating whale only took root in the Showa era. During the Meiji and Taisho periods, whales were primarily used for extracting oil and making agricultural fertilizer, so eating whale was unfamiliar even in Ayukawa. After World War II, as freezing and processing facilities were established, whale meat spread nationwide as a food source supporting the population during food shortages, eventually becoming a regular item on the dinner table. Main products included processed goods such as canned whale yamato-ni (simmered in soy sauce and ginger) and bacon. Whale oil was also used as an

ingredient for glycerin and margarine.

In Ayukawa, the minke whale has been a favorite since before the war. Sashimi, where freshness is vital, is considered the ultimate delicacy, while standard dishes include tatsuta-age (deep-fried whale) and steaks marinated in soy sauce or miso. The season runs from spring through the end of the rainy season. A culture of gifting the first catch of this season to coworkers and relatives still remains, and it is closely tied to annual regional events. At the Oshika Whale Festival, charcoal-grilled whale meat is served for free, making it a popular event that draws visitors from neighboring areas. Some restaurants within Ayukawa's tourism exchange facilities serve dishes unique to the area, such as whale sushi and yukhoe (seasoned raw meat), while shops sell new products developed as part of the reconstruction efforts, carrying on the culture of whale cuisine.

Food and Living

The Keicho Embassy and the Construction of the San Juan Bautista

The Keicho Embassy was a diplomatic mission dispatched in 1613 by Masamune Date, the feudal lord of Sendai. In exchange for tolerating Christian missionary work within his domain, Masamune sought direct trade with Mexico. Tsunenaga Hasekura, a retainer of Masamune selected as the envoy, set sail for the Pacific Ocean alongside the Spanish missionary Luis Sotelo aboard the San Juan Bautista, a Western-style sailing ship built using timber from the Sendai domain.

Hasekura traveled through Mexico to Spain, where he met King Philip III, and then to Rome, where he was granted an audience with

Pope Paul V. However, due to the shogunate's suppression of Christianity and other factors, he was unable to achieve his objectives and returned to Sendai seven years later. Records indicate that the Sendai domain suffered massive damage from the Keicho Tsunami that occurred in December 1611. Since Masamune Date revealed his vision for shipbuilding and the dispatch of the Keicho Embassy just two weeks after the disaster, it is believed that the mission may have embodied his will for recovery.

In Tsukiura on the Oshika Peninsula (Ishinomaki), the site of the ship's departure, there are monuments and a statue of Hasekura created by Churyo Sato, a sculptor from Miyagi Prefecture.



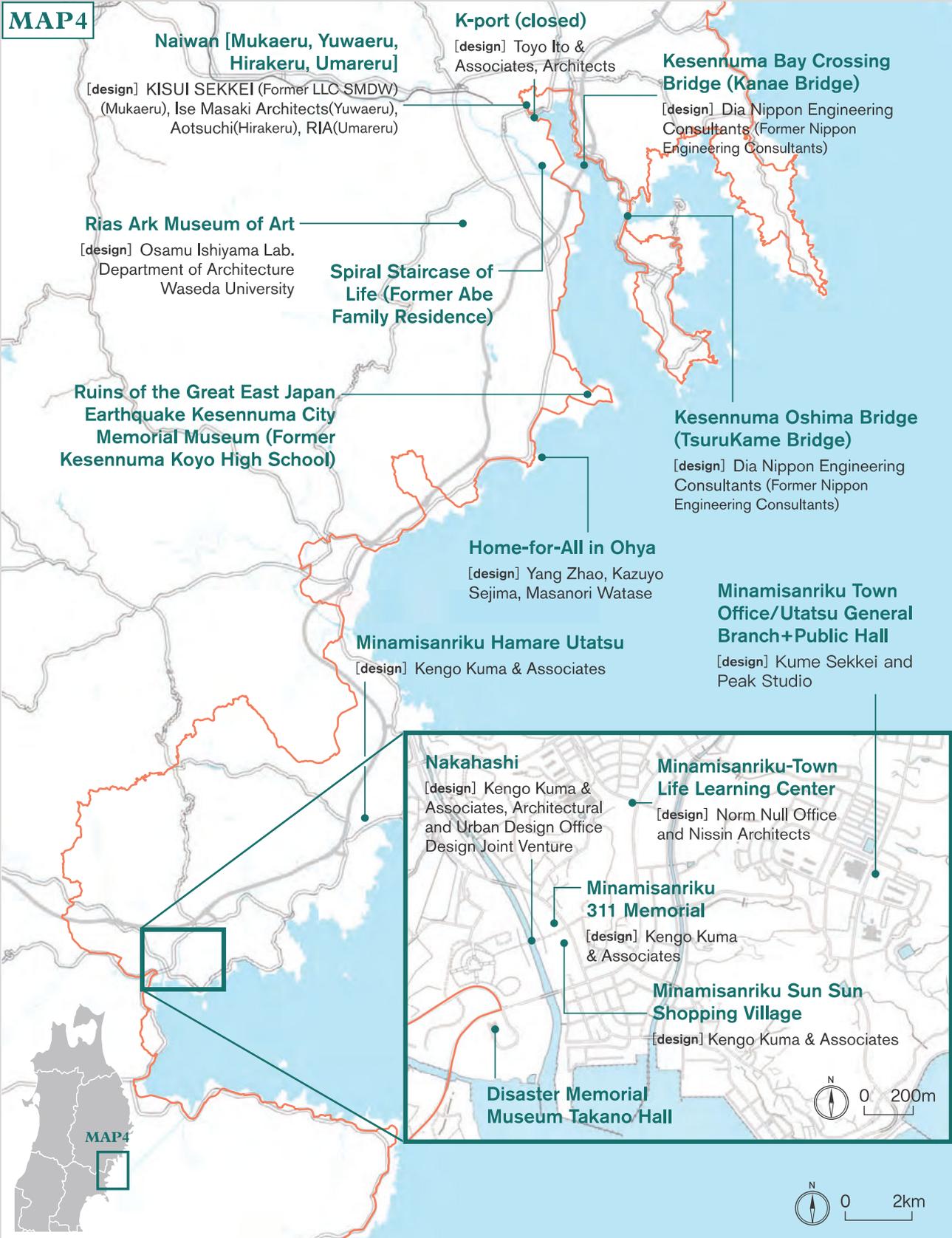
The San Juan Museum, located on a hill overlooking the Oshika Peninsula and the Pacific Ocean. Opened in 1996, the building features a design inspired by contour lines.



A one-quarter-scale replica of the San Juan Bautista, displayed at the San Juan Museum.

Photo(Both item) : Courtesy Miyagi Sant Juan Bautista Museum (the Sant Juan Museum)

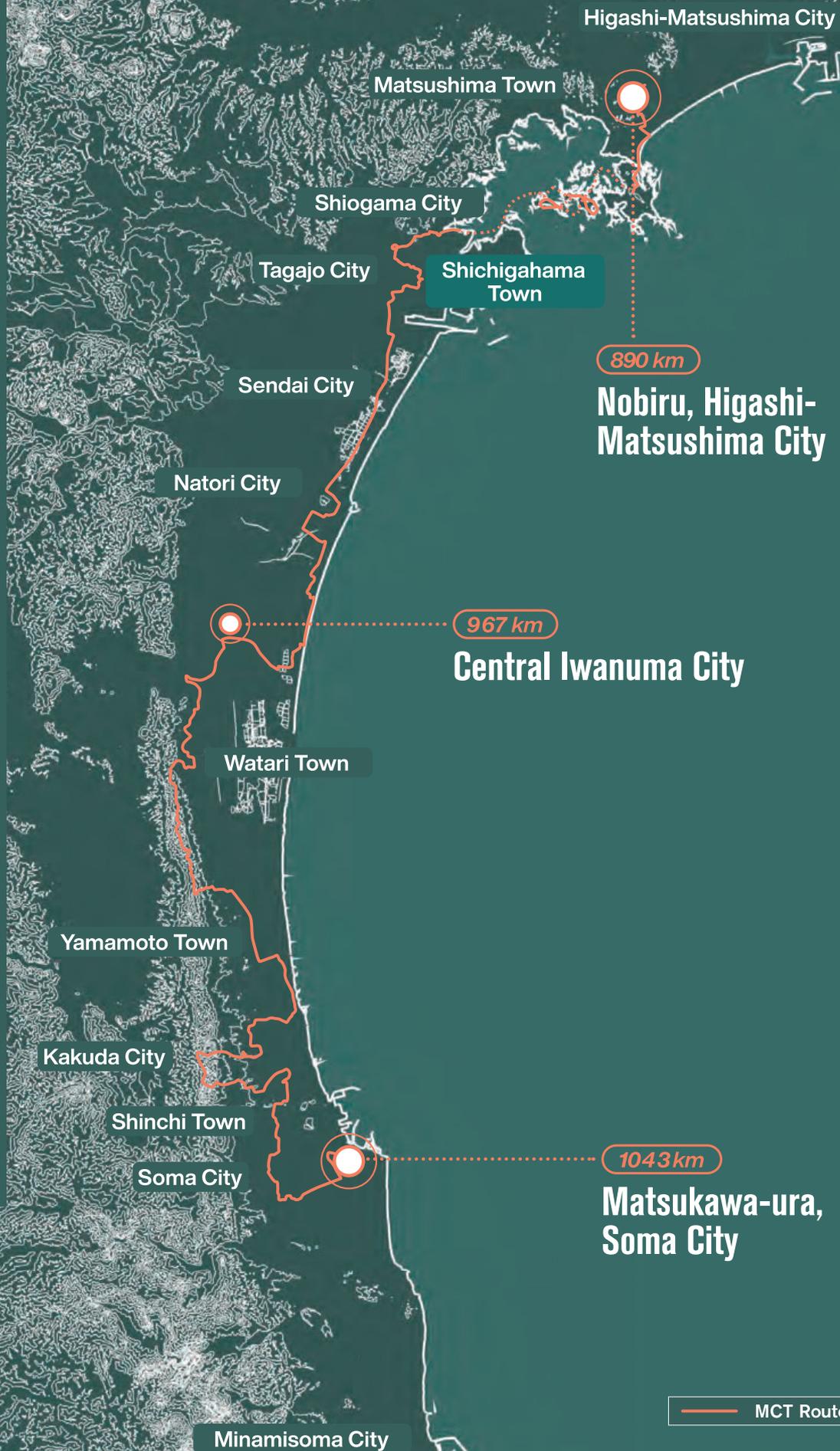
Architecture Map of contemporary buildings and disaster heritage



After the earthquake, several buildings designed to revitalize the city have been constructed. In Kesenuma, commercial facilities integrated with breakwaters. The Ōshima Bridge connecting to Ōshima Island have been built. The Rias Ark Museum of Art has long been an art site rooted in the community. In Minamisanriku, the Sun Sun Shopping Village and the 311 Memorial were born. In Onagawa, a commercial facility near the station is creating a new landscape. In Ishinomaki, young architects are developing reconstruction projects and producing notable architecture.



Southern Miyagi and Fukushima





Landscape of the Trail

Nobiru → Iwanuma

The Yamoto area of Higashi-Matsushima (previously Yamoto Town) is a spacious plain well-suited for the air defense force and rice farming, situated at the southernmost part of Senboku Plain. Meanwhile, most of the Naruse area of Higashi-Matsushima (once Naruse Town) is part of the Matsushima Hills, with its hills coming right up to the shoreline. Go west of Naruse River and the scenery will change even more.

The Matsushima Hills stretch from Nobiru through Matsushima to Shiogama, Tagajo, and Shichigahama. Matsushima Bay was formed when the valleys of these hills sank into the sea. For a long time, the northern people Emishi and the Yamato people sent by the Imperial Court fought across these Matsushima Hills to govern the region.

From Nobiru, crossing the islands of Matsushima Bay

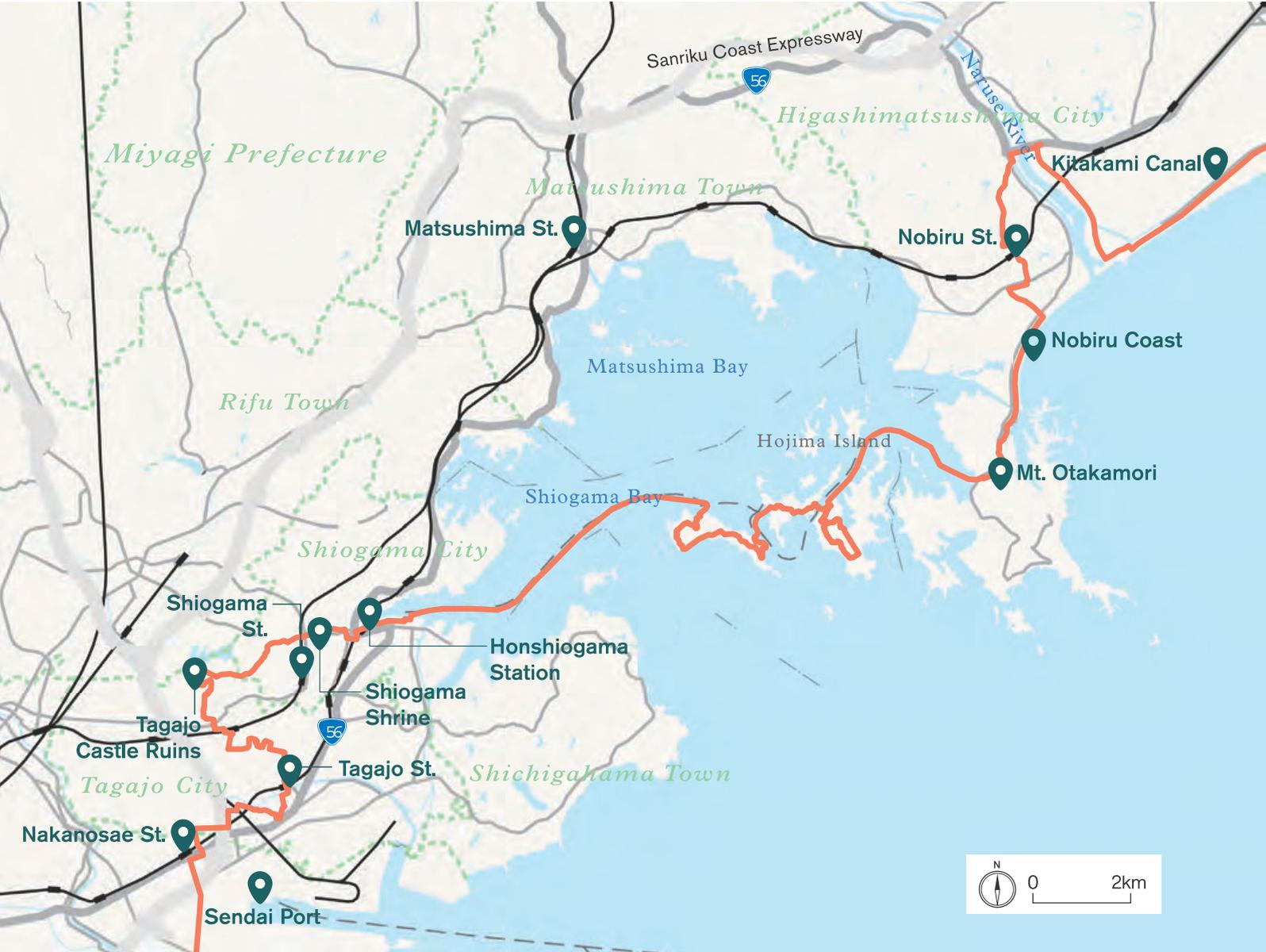
Cross the hills to arrive at Nobiru Station. Take a look at the place where Nobiru Stone was mined before entering Disaster Recovery Memorial Park. The platform at former Nobiru Station is preserved here as a tsunami monument. The former station building is now the Disaster Recovery Memorial Museum, with photos and videos of Higashi-Matsushima after the tsunami on display on the second floor. The first floor

has tourism resources and sells souvenirs using nori seaweed, a local specialty.

Walk for a little while along Tona Canal to reach Nobiru Beach. Stop and enjoy a while. This area had many small islands including Miyato Island but they became part of the mainland due to sand buildup carried from Naruse River, and Miyato Island also became a land-tied island. Now the area has a waterway and bridge.

The part of the MCT on Miyato Island lasts for less than 3 km, ending at Sightseeing





Boat Office Aomina. Matsushima Bay's current lovely scenery, including Miyato Island, was formed 7000 years ago. People lived in Miyato island since the middle of the Jomon period, and many middens were discovered in the area, showing how long people have been continually living here.

The course here is short. Taking a side trip to go through Miyato Island would be just as captivating a hike as the rest of the MCT. Hike the 10 km Miyagi Olle Oku-Matsushima Course while you're here to experience the rich nature and history of Miyato Island. Those who really need to move on can instead go up Mt. Otakamori close to Aomina to get a great view of the area.

Hikers who want to take the boat from Aomina to the Urato islands need to make a reservation in advance through Natori Trail Center. This boat line only runs between April to middle of November. If you're unsure when

you'll arrive in the area or coming during the boat line's off-season, take the year-round Shiogama City ferry to the Urato Islands departing from Shiogama Port Marine Gate Shiogama.

There are three main islands of the Urato Islands, none of which are large. The MCT route goes through all three: Sabusawajima Island, Nonoshima Island, and Katsurashima



Island. The island part of the trail has only gentle slopes, for a relaxed easy hike.

Historic Cities Shiogama and Tagajo

Shiogama City has two parts, the Urato Islands and Shiogama city mainland. Both have few ups and downs and are good for day hiking. For thru-hikers, both Shiogama City and neighboring Tagajo City have a lot of sightseeing points and undeniably a lot of information to try to absorb. A nice way to enjoy this flat plains area with lots of residential neighborhoods is to stay in Shiogama, Tagajo or Sendai, leaving the heavy stuff at your lodging to enjoy unencumbered day hikes.

Arrive at Shiogama Port, the entrance to the Sendai domain. You have entered the Shiogama, Tagajo, and Sendai area, the heart of the Sendai domain, which had strong ties to Edo. The 50 km from here to Abukuma River go through the Sendai Plain, with its modern cityscapes and ways of life. The main commercial district that the MCT route goes through in the Sendai Plain is in harbor city Shiogama. There are especially a lot of shops and restaurants in the 2 km from Marine Gate Shiogama, where the ferry boards, JR Hon-Shiogama Station and Shiogama Shrine.

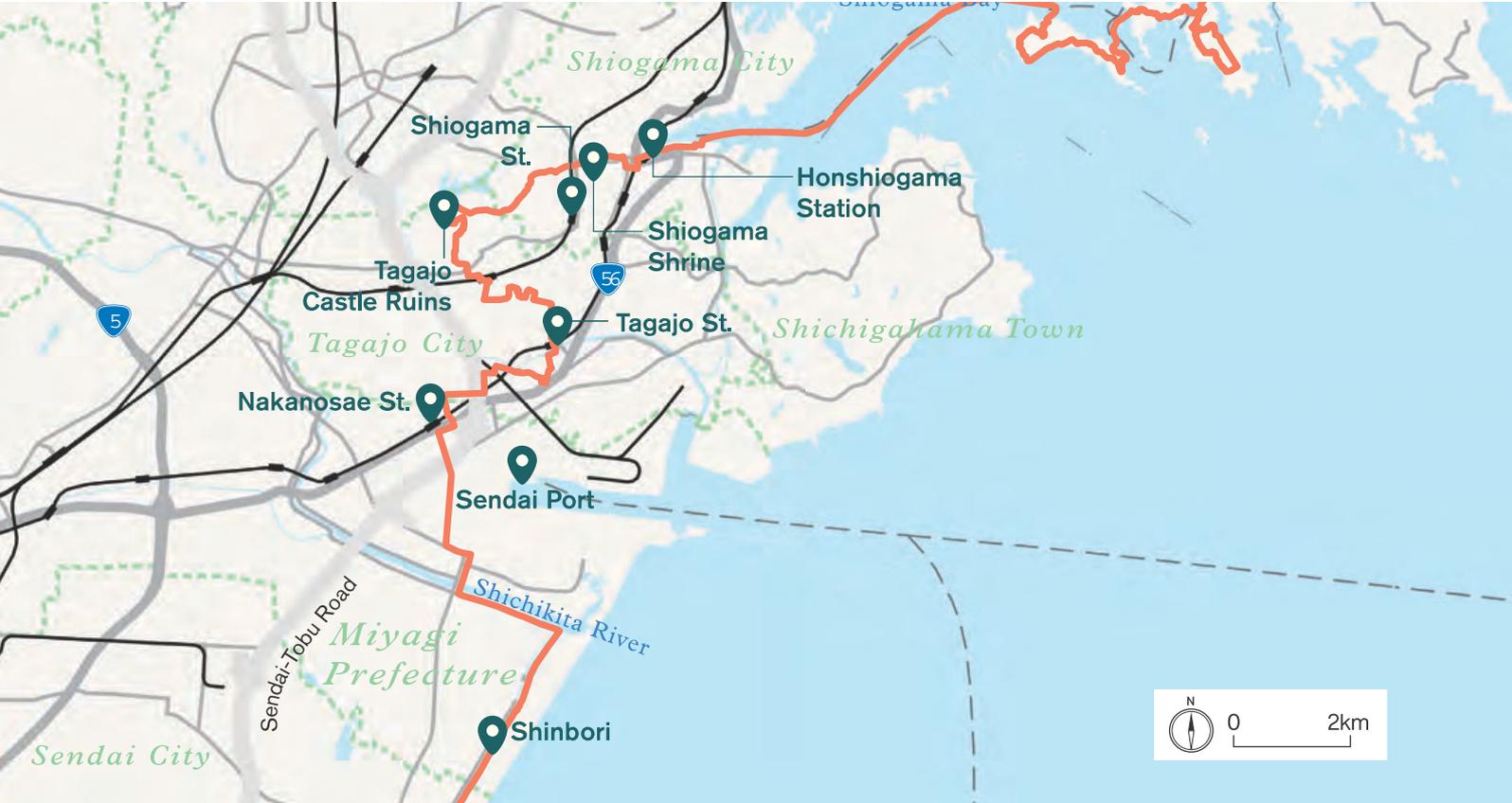
Sushi shops, Italian restaurants, sake breweries and tea cake shops offer hikers a chance at a full stomach. Of course, Aeon Mall is also hard to pass by.

Tagajo's portion of the MCT route is the shortest among the municipalities at 8.5 km and the zigzag route requiring frequent map checks can be a bother to hikers who have hiked in relatively straight lines just far. The route can be grouped into two areas: Kokufu area being the first half, and the second being a residential area.

The area from here until Kokufu-Tagajo Station is Tagajo Castle historical remains. In front of Kokufu-Tagajo Station is the Tohoku History Museum for learning more about the origins of the places you walked. Those coming in via Sendai Airport could visit the museum before their hike to gain a deeper understanding of the area's background.

Walk past the museum to head for Tagajo Station next, entering the residential area portion. Don't worry about the route too much, just relax and walk. Takajo City Library, just before Tagajo Station, is a splendid building with an extensive collection on the Tohoku region on its third floor. Don't be scared off by the stylish ground floor, and go take a look.





The Cultural Heritage of the Edo and Meiji Periods: “Teizan Canal”

After Tagajo Station is “Sue no Matsuyama” pine hill, a place referenced in waka poems and with strong ties to the 869 Jogan earthquake and tsunami. When this tsunami struck, this hill stayed above water while the surrounding area was submerged. This fact was referenced in a poem: “The day I was unfaithful to you would be the day the waves swallow Sue no Matsuyama,” meaning a change of heart would be just as unlikely as Sue no Matsuyama being inundated by waves.

Once you’ve seen Sue no Matsuyama, feel free to head for Nakanosakae Station without worrying too much about exactly following the MCT course. Though you will technically be going through Sendai, it’s 15 km of walking through Sendai Port’s buildings and the cycling course along the Teizan Canal (Shin-bori Canal). Don’t daydream of those busy streets in front of Sendai Station and think of this as an easy walk to rest your legs.

Natori Trail Center, Central Facility of the Trail

Take Yuriage Ohashi bridge to cross the Natori River and enter Natori City. The 9.5 km of

MCT route spent inside Natori City is the second shortest after Tagajo. Cross Natori River and Yuriage area is waiting to brighten a hiker’s day with many useful facilities and shops.

Pass in front of Natori Trail Center and veer around Masuda River before going back towards Teizan Canal to then settle on a road parallel to the canal going south. Those who want to walk along the Masuda River or Teizan Canal can also make that happen. Use the hiking senses you’ve cultivated thus far to choose your own course. Reach the Mitazono Station area for supermarkets



and convenience stores to help stock up. Then, pass by Sendai Airport and reach the end of Natori City.

The MCT in Natori City starts with Natori River and goes along Teizan Canal. In Iwanuma City it starts at the canal and goes along Abukuma River. The courses along these cities resemble each other, with an elevation staying below 5 m, and the highest points being the bridges. Iwanuma City has more parks including the Millenium Hope Hills parks, allowing hikers to worry less about cars. The course turns left at Minamihama Chuo Hospital and heads for Abukuma River.

Go upstream on a pleasant walking path along Abukuma River and head for Abukuma Ohashi Bridge. Venture right from the MCT course at Abukuma Ohashi Bridge for supermarket York Benimaru and go further to reach Iwanuma center. Iwanuma was an inn town at the meeting point between the Oshu Kaido and Edo Kaido roads and even now both the JR Tohoku Main Line and Joban Lines pass through here. Iwanuma has many historical places of interest including Takekoma Shrine.



Landscape of the Trail

Watari → Soma

As the Sendai Plain ends, we enter a cultural area defined by the Abukuma Highlands. A little off the trail, beyond the Tazawa Magyobutsu rock carvings, lies Afuku Kahaku Shrine established by Yamato Takeru in the fourth century. Kahaku refers to the river god. It is said to have changed from “Afuku” to “Abukuma”, the region’s name. The name of Takekoma Shrine in Iwanuma City is derived from “Takekuma”, and the surrounding area belongs to the Abukuma cultural sphere.

The Abukuma River: A Historic Waterway Arterial Route

At the mouth of the Abukuma River lie Torino Umi and Arahama Fishing Port. Arahama Fishing Port prospered as a port for the Edo transport system. Due to its shallow waters, large ships could not enter, and the island near Ishinomaki served as its outer port.

Watari Town has a very rich history, but hikers will take the most note of the Watari horst mountains: the line of mountains at the northernmost part of the Abukuma Highlands. This almost 40 km long ridge of mountains starts at Mt. Nanaune in Watari near Abukuma River and ends at Mt. Karosan. The MCT route follows this ridge while coming down off

the mountains in places. Soon enough, you will follow the MCT along this ridge’s hiking trails.

Cross Abukuma River to enter Watari Town, where the low Watari Plain stretches out between the Abukuma Highlands and the shoreline. The MCT route goes along the mountains and through the home of the Watari-Date clan before entering the peaks of the Abukuma Highlands. The Abukuma Highlands are an elevated peneplain that continue for 170 km from Miyagi Prefecture through Fukushima Prefecture and finally ending at the Kuji River in northern Ibaraki. Its gentle peaks resemble that of the Kitakami Highlands. From the trailhead, build altitude and arrive at Konosu Pass to reach a pleasant hike along the ridge. It’s 5 km until Mt. Shiho.





Tohoku Shinkansen

Iwanuma St.

Abukuma Ohashi Bridge

JR Tohoku Main Line

Mt. Nanaune

Okuma St.

Joban Expressway

JR Tohoku Main Line

Abukuma River

Arahama Fishing Port

Torinoumi

Watari St.

JR Joban Line

Watari Town

Watarai Horst Mountains

7

Mt. Shiho Observatory

49

Kakuda City

Mt. Shiho

Yamashita St.

Mt. Shinzan

Mt. Shinzan Foothills Youth Forest

Yamamoto Town

Sakamoto St.

Sakamoto River

Yamamoto Town Earthquake Relics Nakahama Elementary School

Marumori Town

Isohama Fishing Port

Joban Expressway

224

Suzu Pass

Shinchi St.

Tsurushihama Fishing Port

Mt. Karo

Ukonshimizu

Shinchi Town

Fukushima Prefecture

Soma Port



967

1043



Yamamoto Town, located at the southern end of Miyagi Prefecture

Reach the top of 252 m Mt. Shiho and next is Yamamoto Town. This is the first 12 km long walk along a ridgeline in the MCT. After that, come down into Yamashita, Yamamoto Town and past Yamamoto Town Hall to enter National Route 6. Route 6 goes along the same route as the old Edo Hamakaido road and replaces Route 45 as the major road keeping you company. MCT hikers follow the Hamakaido (aka Route 6) south. Near Miyagi Hospital, the Edo Hamakaido route branches left, away from Route 6 and runs in parallel for a while. While the official MCT route stays on Route 6, hikers who go on the Hamakaido route will eventually meet back up with Route 6 and the main MCT route heading towards Sakamoto Station.

Near Sakamoto Station, the Abukuma hills go right up to the ocean and form a border between Miyagi Prefecture and Fukushima Prefecture, and continuing on to Nakahama on the seaward side. The 1000 kilometer mark of the MCT should be around Sakamoto River. Walk past the Nakahama Memorial Tower and tsunami monument Former Nahakama Elementary School on your left, traveling south.

Cross the road with former Joban line tracks on it, go past the pond, and pass below the Joban line overhead railway.

Shinchi-machi town, aiming for the mountains from the coastline

Enter Shinchi Town, in Fukushima Prefecture, the last prefecture for southbounders on the MCT. Shinchi-machi and Soma combined make up 38 km of the MCT, with 430 m Mt. Karo to hike along the way. Shinchi-machi is the northernmost town in Fukushima, captivating many hikers with its calm country landscape.

Shinchi's section starts close to the shoreline, heading west toward the forested area of Mt. Karo, surrounded by a wide open rice paddy landscape. Shinchi is a tough town for stocking up on food, but on the way to Ukon-Shimizu Spring with its fresh spring water is bread shop Bonheur Yasuhiro 66, which is just the spot for buying. Go up the paved road, and from Suzu-u Pass enter Mt. Karo's "Zao View Course." This course will go along a pleasant 2 km or so along a ridge, but the steep and possibly slippery climb before the top of Mt. Karo is suitably challenging for the MCT's last climb up a summit. At the top are lovely views

of the area. Relish the moment and think how you'd like to hike your last 26 km. Many people will only have a day of walking left. Go through hot spring Karo no Yu, and past several ponds to go down to just in front of the Hamakaido road (Route 6).

The Sea of Soma, Southern Terminus “Matsukawa-ura”

Now to Soma City, the final chapter. In Soma, castle town stretches out to the east of Nakamura Castle ruins. Head for Matsukawa-ura, the southern terminus, while looking for traces of those castle days.

First off is Misagozawa Pond, a reservoir pond that attracts many swans and other migratory birds in the winter. Soma has a lot of ponds. After the Tenmei-era famine in 1783, many new efforts were undertaken to try and improve the lives of the farmers and help the struggling Soma Domain to recover. One such effort was creating new reservoirs. Look at the maps to note how many ponds are dotted between the hills that surround Soma city center.

Enter Nakamura Shrine from the back and then move on to Soma Shrine. Pass through the shopping area and then along Uta River. The south bank of Uta River has Narita and Tsubota areas, where the historical Hotoku method community renewal project was started. Cross

Hyakken Bridge just before where Uta River joins Matsukawa-ura Lagoon, pass over the hills, and Matsukawa-ura Park is close by.

The MCT monument for the southern terminus should be easy to find in the park. It's next to a horse figure, which is just like Soma, the home of the wild horse chase festival. Beyond is a monument engraved with the song “My Hometown Soma.” Come close and a sensor will trigger and play the song.

Hikers that want to end this journey at the ocean can go through the park and towards Matsukawa-ura Lagoon. Unoosaki Lighthouse has the perfect view to gaze at while mulling over your long journey.

Go past Matsukawa-ura Park and turn left at the coastline to visit Funakoshi area with its many inns. Keep going along the road and Matsukawa-ura Ohashi Bridge comes into view. Near the bridge is Hama no Eki Matsukawa-ura which not only sells local seafood and other products but has a restaurant with fresh seafood to enjoy. Stop by for a bite. There's a bus stop in Matsukawa-ura to return to Soma Station.

Cross the bridge and at the base of the shoal is a hill and Unoosaki Lighthouse, and a view over the Pacific ocean. Look to the south and the scenery encountered on the MCT continues on. Past the shoal, a new journey awaits: the Fukushima Coastal Trail.





Watari Town

Kakuda City

Mt. Shihoh Observatory

Mt. Shihoh

Mt. Shinzan

JR Joban Line

Yamashita St.

Yamamoto Town

Sakamoto St.

Sakamoto River

Watari Horst Mountains

Joban Expressway

Marumori Town

Suzu Pass

Ukonshimizu

Mt. Karo

Shinchi St.

Tsurushihama Fishing Port

Matsukawaura Environmental Park / Michinoku Coastal Southern Terminus

Soma Port

Miyagi Prefecture

Matsukawaura Ohashi Bridge

Unoozaki Lighthouse

Jizo River

Misagozawa Pond

Matsukawaura Ohashi Bridge

Soma Nakamura Shrine

Soma Shrine

Soma St.

Uda River

Matsukawaura

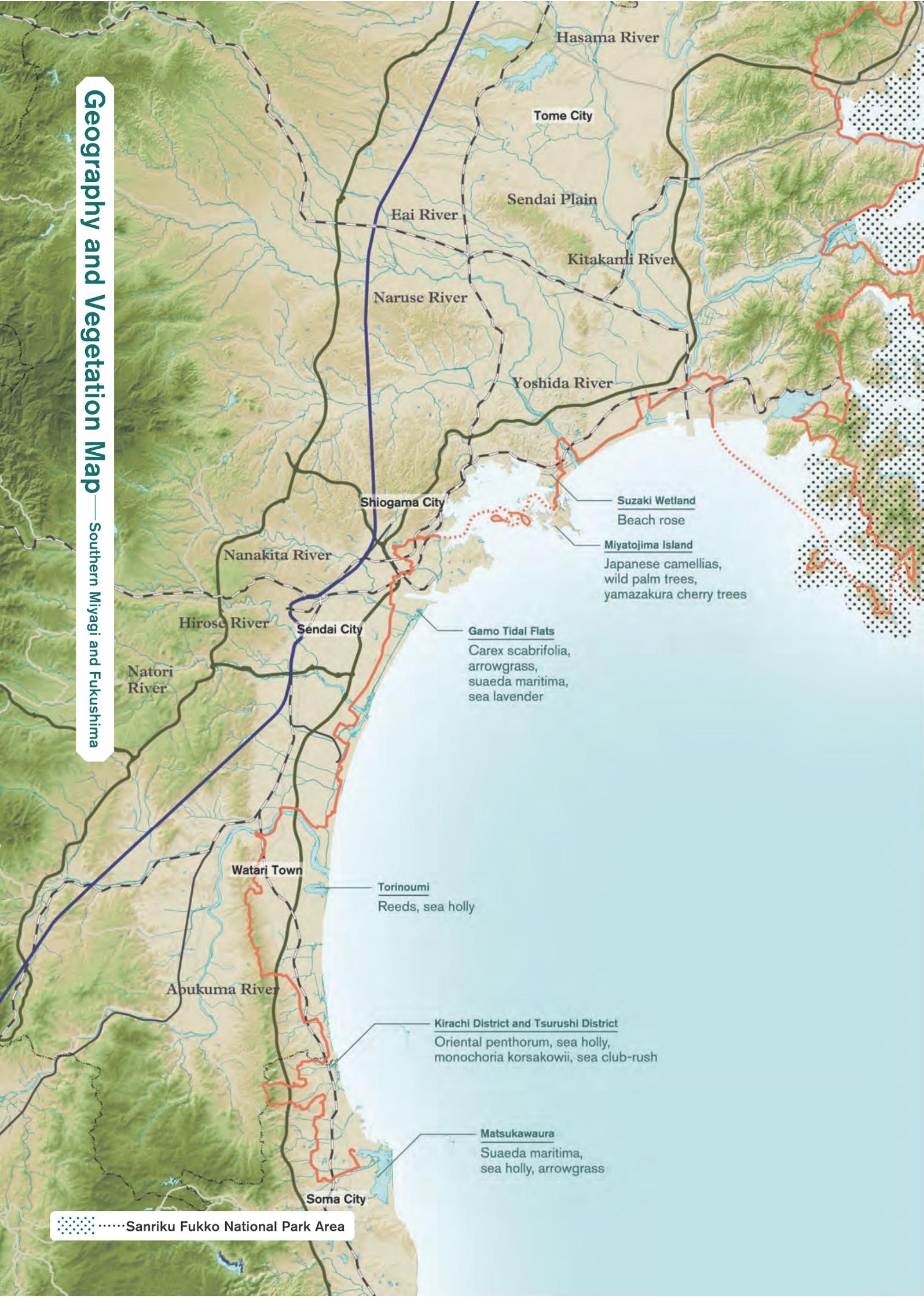
Fukushima Prefecture

Soma City

Minamisoma City



Geography and Vegetation Map — Southern Miyagi and Fukushima



Hasama River

Tome City

Sendai Plain

Eai River

Kitakami River

Naruse River

Yoshida River

Shiogama City

Suzaki Wetland
Beach rose

Miyatojima Island
Japanese camellias,
wild palm trees,
yamazakura cherry trees

Nanakita River

Gamo Tidal Flats
Carex scabrifolia,
arrowgrass,
suaeda maritima,
sea lavender

Hirose River

Sendai City

Natori River

Watari Town

Torinoumi
Reeds, sea holly

Abukuma River

Kirachi District and Tsurushi District
Oriental penthorum, sea holly,
monochoria korsakowii, sea club-rush

Matsukawaura
Suaeda maritima,
sea holly, arrowgrass

Soma City

 Sanriku Fukko National Park Area



From Matsushima Hills toward the south lies the trail's largest plain

Matsushima Bay and the archipelago formed by the submersion of hills

At the western edge of the Kitakami River, the Narese River in Higashi-Matsushima marks the westernmost point of the delta, beyond which lies the vast Matsushima Hills. Nanakita River and Shiogama lie to the south of this circular hill area, and Yoshida River to the north. Matsushima Bay was formed when the sea level rose after an ancient ice age and part of the hills submerged. The bay is shallow, with its depth ranging from approximately 1 to 4 meters, and it is an archipelago with around 260 islands.

The Sendai Plain born from the Ou Mountain Range

The coast from Matsushima Hills to Soma, the Southern Terminus of the trail, is predominantly flat. The Sendai Plain is adjacent to the Matsushima Hills to the south. Broadly speaking, the Sendai Plain is the largest plain in the Tohoku region, occupying most of Miyagi Prefecture, extending from Tome in the north to Watari in the south. Matsushima Hills divide it into the Senboku Plain to the north and the Sennan Plain to the south. The rivers that formed the Sendai Plain flow from the Ou Mountain Range, the backbone of Tohoku region, which extend from the Natsudomari Peninsula in Aomori to the Nasu Mountain Range. Rivers that flow from the mountain ranges to the east, such as the Hasama River, Eai River, Naruse River, Hirose River, Natori River, and Abukuma River, formed the plain.

Unlike the ancient hundreds of millions year old geological formations like the Kitakami Mountains, the Ou Mountain contains is high mountains formed by uplifts of the ocean floor and volcanic activity that occurred after the Japanese archipelago began to form around 15 million years ago. Acting as a barrier between the Pacific side of Miyagi and Iwate and the Japan Sea side of Yamagata and Akita, the Ou Mountains have also blessed the region with abundant rivers and hot springs.

The Sendai Plain, the plain that forms Sendai itself, is a river terrace carved by the Hirose River. The upper, middle, and lower town terraces have formed

from north to south, with the Hirose River flowing even lower than the lowest lower town terrace. Sendai Castle is located on a plateau across the Hirose River from the plain.

The Abukuma River, which nurtured Fukushima

Located at the southern end of the Sendai Plain, the Abukuma River is the second longest among the rivers in Tohoku. Similar to how the Kitakami River flows southward between the Ou Mountain Range and the Kitakami Mountains, traversing the major cities of Iwate Prefecture, the Abukuma River flows northward between the Ou Mountain Range and the Abukuma Highlands, passing through the major cities of Fukushima Prefecture. Its source is at the foot of the Nasu Mountain Range, and it flows through Shirakawa, Koriyama, Nihonmatsu, and Fukushima before reaching the Pacific Ocean at Arahama in Watari, after passing through Shiroishi and Iwanuma in Miyagi Prefecture.





The tsunami reset the vegetation of sandy beaches, tidal flats, and wetlands The restoration of the black pine forest is largely complete

A sandy beach stretches for about 40 km south from Matsuura Bay. Before the earthquake, the landscape was characterized by american dune grass, beach morning glory, asiatic sand sedge, Ixeris repens, beach pea vines, backed by black pine plantations. The black pine, resistant to sea breezes, has been planted and managed since around 1600 for coastal protection, sand dune stabilization, and agricultural purposes. However, the tsunami severely damaged many coastal forests, causing the disappearance of sandy beaches and dune vegetation. Over time, autonomous regeneration began on the site, and several years after the earthquake, a new ecosystem was developing. However, much of this was lost due to subsequent restoration work on the coastal forests and embankments, transforming the area into a semi-natural or artificial coastline. In some areas, biodiversity conservation measures such as “green seawalls”—which involve constructing embankments integrated with seawalls and planting vegetation—have been adopted.

Matsushima Bay

The Matsushima Bay area suffered relatively minor tsunami damage. While eelgrass beds shrank, many habitats—including seaweed beds, tidal flats, and

sandy beaches—along with their vegetation, remained largely intact. The Suzaki Wetlands in the Nobiru district suffered damage from the tsunami, yet many aquatic organisms and dune plants such as beach roses survived. The surrounding environment has been drastically altered by restoration work, but through environmental surveys and conservation measures, the ecosystem is gradually recovering.

Miyato Island is the largest land-connected island in Matsushima Bay. Due to the influence of warm currents flowing northward from the Sendai Bay area, it features a diverse flora where warm-temperate and cold-temperate plants intermingle. Yabutsubaki camellias grow in dense clusters, wild palm trees thrive, and it is even called “Izu of the Northeast.” Yamazakura cherry trees, whose northernmost natural habitat is Miyato Island, have been continuously planted since 2012.

The coastal forests of Matsushima also suffered little impact from the tsunami, but in recent years, damage from pine wilt disease has become severe, and countermeasures are being implemented.

Sendai Bay

Lagoons and tidal flats spread out near the river mouths flowing from the Sennan Plain into the Sendai Bay. It is a transitional zone between land and sea, forming coastal forests and sandy beaches, and serving as a habitat for diverse organisms.



Yamazakura cherry trees in Miyato Island



Gamo tidal flat

At the **Gamo tidal flat** near the mouth of the Nanakitagawa River, plants that thrive in saline wetlands were growing prior to the earthquake. The tsunami destroyed the black pine forests and reed beds, but the tidal flat ecosystem recovered earlier than other areas. The seawall, whose restoration work was completed in 2021, was modified from the original plan and set back several tens of meters toward the landward side.

At the **estuary of the Abukuma River** lies the **lagoon, Torinoumi**, where reed beds spread out and communities of **sea holly** plants can be seen. Although disrupted by the earthquake, the reed beds gradually recovered. New wetlands and tidal flats formed on Hiruzuka Island, located in the center of Torinoumi lagoon, where sea holly is thriving. During restoration work, embankments in the wetland were avoided, and the brackish water environment was maintained by preserving the water connection with Torinoumi, thereby conserving the tidal flat environment.

Shinchi

Even along the coast of Shinchi Town, which suffered tsunami damage, wetlands expanded after the earthquake, and rare plants were confirmed growing there. Subsequently, it was filled in once when the disaster prevention green space was developed, but a saline wetland was restored.

Matsukawaura

Matsukawaura is the largest lagoon in the Sendai Bay area. The area was the most biologically diverse, featuring reed beds on the landward side and rich seaweed beds on the seaward side. Many of the tidal flat's flora and fauna were swept away by the tsunami, and most of the black pine forests were washed out.

After the earthquake, new wetlands and tidal flats formed in parts of coastal forests and former farmland due to the tsunami and land subsidence, resulting in the emergence of saline wetlands. As restoration work progresses, efforts such as establishing protected and conservation areas are being undertaken. The tidal flat environment is recovering, with the restoration and expansion of eelgrass beds being particularly notable. However, challenges such as the spread of invasive species are also emerging.



Torinoumi lagoon and the estuary of the Abukuma River



Asiatic sand sedge



Suaeda maritima



Sea lavender



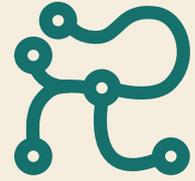
Sea holly



Oriental penthorum



Monochoria korsakowii



Centered around Sendai, the largest city in Tohoku, towns line up along the Oshu Kaido and Hamakado highways.

Town at the forefront of the Yamato Administration

In the Sendai Plain, towns that were historical political stages begin to emerge. This region has seen repeated conquests by the Yamato administration over the local clan known as Emishi since the Kofun period. In the 7th century, when the Ritsuryo administration system was established and centralized control by the Yamato government was strengthened, administrative centers were established in the northernmost Mutsu Province. In the area of Sendai, the Koriyama Kanga and in Osaki, the Myodate Kanga were set up. The town of Tagajo served as the provincial capital of Musashi Province in the 8th century, and it was from here that repeated campaigns against the Emishi were conducted. The scale of the government office here was more than half the size of the Heijo Palace, which was established around that time. In 802, Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, dispatched as the General of the Conquest of the Emishi by the Imperial Court, finally forced the Emishi chieftain, Aterui, to surrender, securing the control of Mutsu Province. Subsequently, the Isawa Castle Stockade was constructed in the northern part of present-day Oshu City, and it became the new frontline headquarters, advancing the central government's expansion northward.

The history of Shiogama Town

Shiogama is the temple town surrounding Shiogama Shrine. It prospered as the outer port of Tagajo Castle, which once was the Yamato government's provincial capital as a military stronghold in Tohoku. The name Shiogama originates from the kamado (hearth) used to boil seawater for salt production. It is considered the birthplace of salt refinement in Japan. While production volumes are low today, the traditional salt-making ritual, the "Moshio-yaki Shinto Rite," is performed every July to preserve this ancient method.

Shiogama Port has always been prone to silting, making it shallow, and the lack of flat land to develop the town was a problem. However, during the Edo period, it became an important port for the Date clan as the gateway to Sendai. While continuously dredging, it allowed large ships to enter. Furthermore, during the Edo period, Sendai's pleasure quarter was relocated here, and a culture of entertainment also took root.

In modern times, it became one of Tohoku's leading fishing vessel bases. Thriving as a base for tuna longline fishing vessels, it boasts Japan's largest landings of fresh tuna and production of fish paste kamaboko. These bountiful ingredients fostered a unique food culture centered around the Shiogama Wholesale Market, making it a sushi town. In 1989, a floating pier for tourist boats was completed at the West Wharf, expanding its tourism functions to Matsushima and the Urato Islands.

The main arteries connecting Fukushima, Miyagi, and Iwate

The primary terrestrial artery of this region was the Oshu Route, or Oshu Kaido. It passes through major towns such as Shirakawa, Koriyama, Nihonmatsu, Fukushima, Shiroishi, and Iwanuma, running parallel to the Abukuma River as the main transportation route by land and water. The current Route 4 corresponds to this road. Beyond Natori, continuing along the Hirose River leads to Sendai, then traverses the Sendai Plain northward toward Osaki. The Oshu Kaido extends farther north, running alongside the Kitakami River from the vicinity of Hiraizumi, passing through major cities in Iwate Prefecture within the Kitakami Basin. A coastal route from the Arakawa River in Kanto passed through Shimosa, Hitachi, Iwaki, and Soma to Iwanuma, known as the Rikuzen Hama Kaido, or Rikuzen Coastal Route. The current Route 6 roughly corresponds to this road. The Hama Kaido merged with the Oshu Kaido at Iwanuma.

Towns established by transferred Bushi warriors

Since the pacification of the Emishi, local powerful clans gradually gained strength as they were appointed to bureaucratic positions while central government officials were dispatched. By the late Heian period, the Fujiwara clan, said to be descended from the powerful Abe clan, held real power, and their base of operations, Hiraizumi, prospered. Although Minamoto no Yoritomo eventually destroyed the Oshu Fujiwara clan, thereafter, with each change in military government, clans that contributed were granted territories, and their bases flourished as towns. During the Kamakura period, the retainers Kasai clan established themselves in Hiraizumi, the Soma clan from Shimosa in Kodaka and the Iwaki in Iwaki. In the

Muromachi period, the Osaki clan settled in Myojo Castle in Osaki, and the Nambu clan, which later became the rulers of Nambu domain, moved to Nukanobu-gun with Kunohe and Ichinohe. Then, during the Sengoku period, military commanders, such as the Date clan, originally based in Okitama (Yonezawa), Fukushima, and Date, were transferred to the territories of the Kasai and Osaki clans under Toyotomi Hideyoshi's orders. They established their headquarters at Iwadeyama in Osaki. Later, they rebuilt the Sendai Castle, formerly the residence of the Kokubun clan, and renamed it under a new Chinese character as Sendai Castle, marking the beginning of Sendai's development under the Date administration.

Water transportation linking the Sendai Plain

The Edo period was an era of logistics. Inland towns without ports relied on rivers and canals as their main transportation routes, and improvements to these routes progressed during that period. Date Masamune began the construction of the Teizan Canal, which was completed during the Meiji period. It was a plan to connect the Abukuma River, which collected goods from the major cities in present-day Fukushima Prefecture, with the Sendai Castle via the Natori River, the Nanakita River, and Matsushima Bay, where the domain's outer port, Shiogama, was located. The development was divided into three stages, with the first being the Kobikibori canal, which connected the warehouses at the mouth of the Abukuma River with the Yuriage at the mouth of the Natori River. It was completed around 1600 and transported rice collected from the Abukuma River basin to the castle town via the Natori River and the Hirose River. The next canal built was the Ofunairibori canal, which connected Shiogama and the Nanakita River (1673). This canal also transported rice to the castle town by going upstream Nanakita River.

In the Meiji era, the need arose for a modern port capable of accommodating large ships, leading to the development of the Nobiru Port as Japan's first modern harbor construction project. Ishinomaki had shallow waters at the mouth of the Kitakami River, and the port of Shiogama had a narrow width. Therefore, Nobiru, which was protected by Miyato Island and had deep waters and proximity to Ishinomaki and Shiogama, was considered as a candidate site. However, in 1881, just three years after the inner harbor was completed, a typhoon caused the breakwater to collapse, leading to the port's abandonment. In conjunction with the construction of Nobiru Port, the Shinbori canal, located in the middle of the Teizan Canal mentioned previously, was excavated in 1889. Similarly, in anticipation of the harbor construction,

the Kitakami Canal linking the Kitakami River with Nobiru and the Tona Canal (1884) connecting Nobiru with Matsushima Bay were also created. With these developments, a long water transportation route linking the Kitakami River to the Abukuma River was completed.

The East Sea Route to Edo

The Abukuma River was the most important waterway for transportation, but there were narrow and swift sections north of Fukushima. In 1664, Edo merchant Watanabe Tomoi improved these conditions, allowing stable transportation of rice to Arahama Minato at the river mouth. From Arahama Port, the rice was transferred to cargo ships and transported to Edo via the Tone River route from Choshi. Later, in 1670, Kawamura Zuiken improved the Abukuma River and, in the following year, developed a route directly to Edo via the Boso Peninsula for cargo ships. Large cargo ships, including the largest at the time, the Sengoku Bune boat, began operating from Arahama Port to Edo, completing the East Sea Route. Large cargo ships from Sakata on the Sea of Japan crossed the Tsugaru Strait, passed through Sanriku via Ishinomaki, Arahama, Choshi, Shimoda, and finally reached Edo, marking the beginning of full-scale maritime transport. It is said that a large amount of rice collected from the Kitakami River and transported to Ishinomaki was sent to Edo, with about one-third of the rice entering Edo at that time coming from the Date domain.





Oyster farming in Matsushima Bay. A simple suspended cultivation method using bamboo is employed.

Sea-based Livelihoods

Sanriku Oysters: Developed Through Repeated Research into Aquaculture Methods

Sanriku is an oyster-production area comparable to Hiroshima. Although oyster farming in Sanriku has been attempted since the Edo period, it was not until the Showa era that it spread rapidly.

It began in Matsushima Bay, which is famous as a production site. Starting in the 17th century by scattering natural spats (baby shellfish) on the sea surface to grow them, by the Meiji era, the method evolved to setting

up pine trees in the sea to attach seeds and cultivate the spats.

When the hanging (suika) aquaculture method was developed in Kanagawa in 1923, it was introduced to Matsushima Bay and Mangoku-ura Inlet, enabling stable production. In the 1930s, a research institute in Miyagi Prefecture developed the raft-type aquaculture method, which allowed production even in deep bays, and this spread to Kesenuma Bay. Subsequently, the longline hanging aquaculture method developed in 1952 was introduced in Iwate Prefecture, and its application progressed to the aquaculture of oysters, scallops, and wakame seaweed in the open ocean.

Traditional Rice Cultivation by Fuyumizu-tambo Method on Sabusawa Island

Fewer than 300 people (as of 2024) live on the four inhabited islands of the Urato Islands, where livelihoods cultivated by history and rich nature continue today. Representative industries include marine products such as oyster farming and nori seaweed, as well as rice cultivation. The production of oyster farming/seed oysters is the islands' key industry, boasting a history of over 300 years. The peak harvest season (November to January), when the island's women turn out in force to shuck and ship oysters, heralds the arrival of the season as a characteristic island scene.

Rice cultivation is practiced only on Sabusawa Island within the Urato Islands. Whereas many islanders once led semi-agricultural, semi-fishing lives, only one farming household remains today. They cultivate Sasanishiki rice using a traditional farming method called fuyumizu-tambo (winter-flooded rice paddies). This method, which relies solely on rainwater because there are no rivers, uses snow and rainwater collected in winter for agricultural water; a key feature is that the water is not drained from the paddies even after the autumn rice harvest. Keeping the paddies in a muddy state allows them to retain a lot of water for long periods, which nurtures microorganisms and has the advantage of making the soil fertile. Although the paddies were submerged in seawater during the Great

East Japan Earthquake, rice cultivation resumed without desalination, and they were reportedly able to harvest. Sabusawa Rice, finished by traditional sun-drying, is not circulated on the market for consumption due to low production volume, but since 2009, the sake Junmai Ginjo Urakasumi Sabusawa, brewed using this rice in cooperation with a sake brewery in Shiogama, has been produced and sold.

Paddy Agriculture Supported by Wisdom from the Edo Period

Masamune Date boasts unwavering popularity as a Sengoku warlord. His achievements in laying the foundation for the 620,000-koku Sendai domain were not limited to military and political affairs. Osaki Koudo is a vast agricultural zone spreading across one city and four towns (Osaki, Wakuya, Misato, Kami, and Shikama) in Northern Miyagi Prefecture. The planted area of wet-land rice in Osaki Koudo accounts for about 30% of the planted area in the prefecture; brand rice varieties, including Sasanishiki and Hitomebore, were born here, and it has developed as one of Japan's leading paddy zones.

However, this land was originally unsuitable for agriculture. It faced cold damage caused by the yamase (seasonal winds unique to Tohoku), river flooding caused by terrain that changes from steep mountainous areas to vast plains, and surface water shortages due to water sinking underground in alluvial fans.



The Osaki Plain, comprising one city and four towns in northern Miyagi Prefecture. It is one of Japan's leading rice-producing areas.

In this severe natural environment, Masamune Date, who became the first lord of the Sendai domain, focused on developing new rice fields, squeezed out wisdom to adjust water, and constructed a water management system. He enabled a stable supply of water through intake weirs, irrigation/drainage tunnels, and reservoirs, and he reduced flood damage to settlements by using rice paddies as retarding basins to release water during floods. The adjustment and management of water are based on keiyaku-ko, a traditional mutual aid organization. In 2017, the Osaki Koudo's Traditional Water Management System for Sustainable Paddy Agriculture was designated as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Sasanishiki, a representative rice brand of Miyagi, was born in Osaki Koudo in 1963. It was developed as a late-planting variety during an era when double-cropping of wheat and rice was encouraged to increase food production. Because it had a high yield and good taste, it became popular nationwide, second only to Koshihikari; however, it was susceptible to rice blast disease and low temperatures, and production volume decreased significantly following record-breaking cold damage in 1993. Hitomebore was born to replace it, featuring resistance to cold damage. Currently, the planted area of Sasanishiki is small, but its clean flavor is strongly supported by sushi chefs, and supply to sushi restaurants and

traditional Japanese restaurants continues.

Urakasumi: Brewed as the Sacred Sake of Shiogama-jinja Shrine

Among the areas of the MCT, rice cultivation thrives the most in the Sendai region. Miyagi Prefecture, blessed with sufficient sunshine during the day and relatively cool nights, is good for rice growth, which brings out the sweetness of the rice. It has a long history: in the mid-Edo period, when new rice field development with active measures against cold damage and floods progressed, it accounted for two-thirds of the distributed rice at the time.

Tohoku, a rice-producing region, is also a sake-producing region. One of the breweries representing Miyagi Prefecture is Saura, which began sake brewing in Shiogama in 1724. In the 1800s, the brewery received an order from the Sendai domain to become the sacred sake brewery for Shiogama Shrine, and it has been in business for over 300 years since.

Urakasumi, the sake representing Saura, was born when the brewery was granted the honor of presenting sake to the Showa Emperor, then Prince Regent, during grand maneuvers in the Tohoku region in the Taisho era. Sagoro and Juichi Hirano, Nanbu Toji (master brewers), were the ones who spread the name of Urakasumi over time and built the foundation of the sake brewing that continues



Brewing preparations at Saura, the brewery of Urakasumi sake. [Photo: Courtesy Saura Co., Ltd.]



An overview of JR Fruits Park Sendai ARAHAMA. Orchards line the Tohoku Fukko Road visible on the right.

today. Sagoro became the toji (head brewer) in 1949, shortly after the war, and mastered the Nanbu Toji style of sake brewing characterized by the aroma and clean quality produced by long-term fermentation at low temperatures. Since then, Urakasumi, maintaining this Hirano style, developed the ginjo sake Urakasumi Zen in the '70s, which led to the subsequent local sake boom, and it continues to evolve.

The characteristic of Urakasumi as a food-friendly sake that harmonizes taste and aroma without becoming tiring to drink was born from the food culture of a region blessed with fresh seafood. Today, it continues to coexist with the region by using Miyagi-produced rice for about 90% of its total usage and selling Junmai Ginjo Urakasumi Sabusawa brewed with rice from Sabusawa Island.

A New Form of Agriculture Gathering People: JR Fruits Park Sendai ARAHAMA

JR Fruits Park Sendai ARAHAMA opened in 2021, exactly 10 years after the disaster, as a utilization of the coastal area where settlement became impossible due to the Great East Japan Earthquake. In the vast orchard (over 8.5 hectares), more than 150 varieties of eight items are cultivated. Blueberries, grapes, pears, and apples are harvested in the open fields, and strawberries are harvested in vast vinyl greenhouses of 2,000 square meters, allowing visitors to experience fruit picking throughout the year.

The site was a section of a residential area where 800 households lived before the disaster. To convey the history of the region, the orchard is divided into areas utilizing the road divisions from before the disaster. The Arahama District is famous for the Teizan Canal, and freshwater clam fishing was also actively conducted in the Edo period. Within walking distance is the disaster ruin Sendai Arahama Elementary School, which exhibits conditions and history from before the disaster; additionally, a skateboard park is located near the Fruit Park, and regional characteristics different from before the disaster are emerging.

In addition to the tourist farm, the Fruit Park develops businesses such as a direct sales store selling vegetables and processed goods from local agricultural operators and a cafe restaurant, and it also conducts cultivation incorporating new agricultural technologies. Among the programs welcoming general guests, strawberry picking featuring the Miyagi-developed varieties Niko-niko Berry and Mouikko is highly popular. In the high season, it is so popular that reservations cannot be



Photo(Both item): Courtesy JR Fruits Park Sendai ARAHAMA

The entrance to the orchard at JR Fruits Park Sendai ARAHAMA.

made. By actively accepting study visits as well as tourists, it aims to be “a place where people gather again.”

Wada Strawberry Farm: The First to Start Strawberry Picking in Tohoku

The Wada District in Soma is the place where strawberry picking began for the first time in Tohoku in 1989; it remains a representative tourist spot in Soma, visited by many tourists from inside and outside the city.

Facing Matsukawa-ura where fishing is thriving, the Wada District, which long made a living through nori aquaculture and clam fishing, began strawberry cultivation around 1948, shortly after the war. Volunteers began open-field cultivation of strawberries to create a livelihood outside of the fishery industry. It is said that strawberries at the time were such ultra-luxury items that sufficient profit could be made even by taking the train to Tokyo to sell them. Afterward, it continued to grow as an industry, becoming one of the leading strawberry-production areas in the prefecture. When they switched to cultivation in vinyl greenhouses in the 1980s, production volume increased, but labor shortages due to the aging of farmers became a problem.

Taking this opportunity, 15 farming households gathered to form the Wada Tourism Strawberry Association, and in 1989, following successful examples nationwide, they opened Wada Tourist Strawberry Farm, the first strawberry-picking farm in Tohoku.

The Great East Japan Earthquake dealt a major blow to the strawberry picking, which was so popular that around 60,000 tourists visited in one season at its peak. In addition to many of their greenhouses being washed away by the tsunami, the number of farmers was halved due to the impact of harmful rumors. However, it reopened the following year. It has been recovering smoothly to this day. Incidentally, in Yamamoto, Miyagi Prefecture, not far from Soma, strawberry cultivation began in the 1930s during the Showa Depression as a substitute for sericulture, and it was a leading production area in Japan. Although this area also suffered great damage from the disaster, it has succeeded by incorporating new business models such as incorporation, crowdfunding, and the establishment of strawberry complexes.

The strawberry-picking season at Wada Tourist Strawberry Farm runs from after New Year's until the end of May. Forty-five years after its start, the opening day is reported annually, becoming a seasonal tradition of spring in Fukushima.



Cultivation shelves at Wada Tourist Strawberry Farm, known for strawberry picking.
[Photo: Courtesy Soma City Tourist Association]



A storehouse built of Nobiru stone that survived the tsunami.

Production Area of Nobiru Stone, Which Nurtured Regional Architectural Culture

In Nobiru, located in Oku-Matsushima, a region-specific stone called Nobiru Stone has been produced. This is a type of tuff, and because it is easy to process, it has been used as stone material for walls, fences, and kamado (cooking stoves). Since the Edo period, it was shipped nationwide as a major construction material alongside Akiu Stone mined in Akiu. Although the stone industry declined from around 1965, remains of quarries still exhibiting signs of terrain carved by humans, as well as many houses and warehouses using Nobiru Stone, prevail in this region today. One of them is the Nobiru Stone Warehouse located next to the Old Nobiru Station, which is a disaster ruin. The Nobiru Stone Material Monument, which

eluded damage, has also been relocated here. Nobiru Coast, close to the station, is a scenic spot with a sandy beach continuing for about 3 kilometers. This vicinity was once called the Suma of Tohoku, and visitors can see islands scattered in the sea and strange rocks where Nobiru Stone has eroded into interesting shapes.

Another important history of Nobiru is the Nobiru Port. The Meiji government undertook a national project to develop Japan's first Western-style modern harbor here, preceding Nagasaki and Yokohama. Planning started in Meiji 11 (1878), and just as the inner harbor district was completed and expansion to the outer harbor district was expected, a typhoon struck directly. The government abandoned construction, and this plan ended in failure. Currently, only the Tona and Kitakami Canals remain.



Brick bridge pier remains at the site of the former Nobiru Port construction project.

Shinchi Town: Supporting Electricity in Eastern Japan through Thermal Power Generation

Shinchi, the northernmost point of the Hamadori region in Fukushima Prefecture, has two thermal power plants that generate electricity for Tohoku. Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, dependence on thermal power generation has increased rapidly, and as of 2022, thermal power accounts for over 70% of domestically generated electricity. Although the introduction of renewable energy is expanding toward a decarbonized society, thermal power generation is indispensable for a stable supply of electricity. Operations continue while working on reducing environmental impact and contributing to the local community.

The Fukushima Natural Gas Power Plant began operations in 2020 as part of the Fukushima Innovation Coast Framework, a national project promoting industrial

reconstruction in Fukushima. It uses liquefied natural gas (LNG) as fuel for power generation. LNG is a clean energy with low emissions of greenhouse gases and substances that cause air pollution. Warm wastewater from the power plant is discharged outside the port, taking care not to affect the surrounding ecosystem.

The second plant, the Soma Kyodo Power Company Shinchi Power Plant, has used coal as its main fuel since initiating operations in 1994, supplying generated electricity to Tohoku Electric Power and TEPCO Energy Partner. With both Units 1 and 2 having an output of 1,000 MW (1 million kW) among the largest generation capacities in Japan, it is an important power plant for regions north of Kanto. Since 2015, it has introduced carbon-neutral woody biomass fuel and recycled coal ash (cinder) generated at the Shinchi Power Plant into artificial crushed stone. It is working to reduce environmental load, such as utilizing this as aggregate close to natural soil and rock at construction sites for reconstruction projects.



Festival

Soma Nomaoi: The Largest Festival in Soma, Continuing for a Thousand Years

Soma Nomaoi is Soma's largest festival and is known nationwide. The sight of armored warriors racing horses and scrambling on horseback for sacred flags launched into the sky is heroic and leaves a lasting impression on many.

This festival is held jointly by three shrines—Soma Ota Shrine, Soma Odaka Shrine, and Soma Nakamura Shrine—that trace their roots to the Myoken Shrine, which serves as the guardian deity of the Soma clan, the former feudal lords. It is held over three days. On the first day, participants gather at their respective shrines for a departure ceremony and a ritual to welcome the General Commander before setting off for the Hiburigahara Festival Grounds. The second day begins with a spectacular procession of 400 armored horsemen marching to the main headquarters at the Hiburigahara Festival Grounds. This is followed by the Armored Horse Race, where riders remove their helmets, don white headbands, and compete for speed over 10 laps of a 1,000-meter course, as well as the Sacred Flag Scramble, the festival's highlight. The sight of hundreds of

horsemen vying for two sacred flags falling from launched fireworks resembles a battle scene. A total of 20 fireworks are launched, and a battle unfolds over a total of 40 sacred flags. On the final day, the Nomagake ritual is held at Odaka Shrine. In this ritual, which retains traces of military training by Taira no Masakado, riders drive sacred horses into a bamboo corral and capture the best among them. With this, the festival concludes. Although it used to be held every summer, starting in 2024, it is scheduled at the end of May.

The roots of the Soma clan lay in the Kanto region. They were a branch of the Chiba clan, retainers of the Kamakura Shogunate, and held territory in Soma District, Shimousa Province (near present-day Kashiwa and Matsudo, Chiba Prefecture). Their distant ancestor, Taira no Masakado, released wild horses within the territory of Soma District to conduct military training; this practice became a sacred ritual and was passed down to the Soma clan as the Soma Nomaoi. Due to military exploits in the Kamakura government's battle to defeat the Oshu Fujiwara clan, the Soma clan migrated to Odaka in Michinoku (Tohoku), and the Nomaoi has been performed in this region ever since. Soma Nomaoi, which has continued for over a thousand years since the time of the Soma clan, is now designated as an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan.



The departure ceremony and procession of Soma Nomaoi, a traditional horse festival. [Photo: Courtesy Soma City]

Utamakura of Michinoku Composed by Basho Matsuo in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*

Tagajo contains the only utamakura (poetic landmark) on the Michinoku Coastal Trail route that was depicted in Basho Matsuo's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Scenery that evokes the past remains today, allowing visitors to retrace Basho's footsteps.

The National Treasure Tsubo no Ishibumi (Tsubo Monument) is an ancient stele standing right next to the ruins of the Tagajo South Gate; it is a famous utamakura that has been included in poems since the late Heian period. Saigyō and Minamoto no Yoritomo also wrote waka poems about it, and its rediscovery in the early Edo period caused a great sensation. Upon facing the monument during his journey for *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Basho saw its unchanged appearance despite the passage of a long time and wrote of his emotion, stating, "Tears fell."

About 3 kilometers from Tsubo no Ishibumi lies Sue no Matsuyama, which was known as an utamakura in the Heian period. Two large Japanese black pines stand atop a hill; because of the legend that not even a massive tsunami could cross over it, the site came to signify a great presence or a pledge of love in waka poetry. Graves are lined up at the foot of this Matsuyama, and upon seeing this scene, Basho created a haiku expressing impermanence,

reflecting that even eternal pledges between men and women eventually turn into the graves.

Furthermore, situated nearby is the utamakura Okinoi, where strange rocks cluster in a pond about 20 meters wide, allowing visitors to sense ancient culture through Basho's Edo-period experience. Tsubo no Ishibumi, Sue no Matsuyama, and Okinoi are designated as a National Place of Scenic Beauty under Scenic Areas of *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*.

Keyhole-shaped Tumuli Seen in *Tohoku: Raijin-yama Kofun (Natori) and Tomizuka Kofun (Sendai)*

The Raijin-yama Kofun is a keyhole-shaped tumulus built at the eastern edge of the Medeshima Hills in the center of Natori. It is the largest in the Tohoku region and is a nationally designated Historic Site. Based on the excavation of Haji ware from the Early Kofun period from its surface, it is believed to have been built between the late 4th and early 5th centuries as the tomb of a chief who held immense power under the control of the Yamato polity. It is currently maintained as a historic park alongside the adjacent Kozuka Kofun and serves as a place of relaxation for citizens.

The Tomizuka Kofun is a keyhole-shaped tumulus located on the natural levee of the left



Raijin-yama Kofun (center) and the cityscape of Natori.



The Tsubo no Ishibumi (Tsubo Monument) (Tagajo Stele), a National Treasure created in the Nara period to commemorate the restoration of Tagajo.



Memorial monuments and the "Mebae no To (Tower of Budding)" at Natori Earthquake Disaster Memorial Park.

bank of the Hirose River, approximately 3.6 kilometers southeast of JR Sendai Station in the eastern part of Sendai; it is the second-largest in the prefecture. Constructed around the end of the 4th century, it is thought to be the burial site of a powerful clan that ruled the entire Sendai Plain. Although soil was taken by the occupation forces after the war and the square front part was shaved off by bypass construction, altering its shape, it was designated as a National Historic Site in 1968 and restored as a historic park. Excavated artifacts are exhibited at the Sendai City Museum.

The Three Shrines of Natori Kumano and the Story of the Old Woman of Natori

Kumano Hongu Shrine, Kumano Shrine, and Kumano Nachi Shrine in the Takadate District of Natori are called the Natori Kumano Sansha (Three Shrines) and are the center of the Kumano faith in Tohoku. This is the only location in Japan where the three shrines were individually enshrined by likening Sendai Bay to the Kumano Sea, the Natori River to the Kumano River, and the Takadate Hills to the Kumano Mountains, reproducing the same geographical and directional relationship as the Kii Kumano Sanzan. According to the Kumano-do Engi written in the Muromachi period, there was a shrine maiden in the late Heian period who frequently made pilgrimages to Kumano in Kii. It is said that when she grew old and could no longer make the journey, she reproduced

the three Kumano shrines in this land. The shrine maiden was called the Natori Rojo (Old Woman of Natori), and records remain that a Noh play based on her legend was performed in the Muromachi period. Straw sandals are dedicated to a stone monument erected by locals in memory of the old woman's virtue, in hopes of attaining her strong legs.

Disaster Memorial Parks: Millennium Hope Hills

The Millennium Hope Hills were established along approximately 10 kilometers of the coast in Iwanuma with the wish that children would live happily for a thousand years into the future. They were developed as six parks retaining the names of pre-disaster settlements and as a "green seawall" connecting hills that function as temporary evacuation sites. Disaster debris, evidence of people's lives, was used for the foundations of the hills, and the site is operated as both a memorial park and a place for disaster prevention education.

Hiyoriyama in the Natori City Earthquake Memorial Park is a man-made hill created in 1920 to observe the weather and sea conditions. It offers a view of the entire Yuriage area and currently serves as a place for repose where people gather. There is a Tower of Sprouting standing 8.4 meters tall—the same height as the tsunami during the Great East Japan Earthquake—and the 3.11 Natori/Yuriage Memorial Event is held every March 11. The Yuriage Port Morning Market is located close by, and this park can be used for breaks during shopping.



MAP6



The historic city of Tagajo has Tohoku History Museum, while its coastal area of Shichigahama features notable works by young architects, including a school, nursery, and municipal housing. In Sendai city many famous buildings like the Sendai Mediatheque can be seen. Along the trail route's coastal area, art projects exist. Commercial facilities in the Yuriage district near the Natori Trail Center. The Yamamoto Town Hall and the LVMH Kids Art Maison in Soma city center also gained attention as architect's projects.

