

History of the Nagamachi District

Here in the Nagamachi district of feudal Kanazawa, the Murai and the Cho, two of the highest-ranking and wealthiest samurai families (*bakka*) in the Kaga domain (feudal-era Ishikawa Prefecture) had their residences. Some argue that the name Nagamachi itself comes from the Cho family's use of the character for "long" (which can be read as either *cho* or *naga*) to write their name.

Throughout the Edo period (1603–1867) and to this day, Nagamachi has escaped severe fire damage. Thus, it exists in a rare state of preservation. While today a few modern houses dot the area, the narrow streets, active water channel system, earthen walls, and gates called *nagaya-mon* ("longhouse gates") still evoke the townscape of an era long past. With the beginning of modernization in 1868 and the subsequent abolition of the feudal class system, Nagamachi was opened to all residents; yet even today it retains the atmosphere of its days as a samurai district.

Visitors can learn more about samurai life by visiting various sites around Nagamachi. The Takada Family House has exhibits about the lives of middle-ranking samurai (*heishi*) and their servants (*chugen*). There is also the Kanazawa City Ashigaru Museum with displays about the lifestyle of the lowest ranking samurai, the *ashigaru* or foot soldiers.

The Onosho Yosui (water supply channel) that runs through Nagamachi is believed to be the oldest such channel in Kanazawa. Its date of construction is unknown, but the channel has been used variously for transporting goods into town, and for supplying water to the stroll gardens of the samurai residences.