

### **Yunotsu-Okidomari Road at Nishita**

Now surrounded by picturesque rice fields, the quiet settlement of Nishita was once an important post town on the road connecting the Iwami Ginzan mine with the ports of Yunotsu and Okidomari. Although silver was only transported to the coast during a 40-year period in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the road was the main source of supplies to and from the mine until the late 1800s. With so much traffic passing through, Nishita's teahouses, inns, and taverns thrived, while regular markets attracted people from nearby villages.

Local people would pray for prosperity at Kami'ichi Ebisu Shrine, which honors Ebisu, one of the Seven Gods of Luck and the patron of tradesmen. The small shrine is located at one end of the settlement. Prayers for protection against fire were said to Kannon, the bodhisattva of mercy, while other statues of Buddhist deities carved out of stone were also placed along the road to ensure safety. All these sites of worship remain today, as does the tradition of *yo-zukuhade*, a time-honored technique for drying harvested rice plants in the sun. Unique to Nishita, this practice takes its name from the word *yo-zuku*, which means "owl" in the local dialect. When the wooden frames used to dry the rice plants are full, they are said to resemble these nocturnal birds.