

Yunotsu Historic District

Once a modest fishing village and little-known *onsen* (hot spring), Yunotsu grew into a crucial source of supplies for Iwami Ginzan. In 1561, the Mohri family built a harbor and coastal fortifications at the mouth of the long, narrow valley. The steep rocky slopes on both sides of the town made it easy to defend, and Yunotsu flourished as the main port supplying the silver mine with food, fuel, building materials, alcohol, tobacco, and other basic goods. The Mohri also engaged in trade with China, the Korean peninsula, and other faraway lands, giving the town a somewhat international character.

Yunotsu enjoyed further prosperity during the Edo period (1603–1867), when it became a port along the Kitamaebune shipping route along the Sea of Japan coast connecting the Hokuriku region of northern Japan with the mercantile city of Osaka on the Inland Sea. Officially established in 1672 and later extended to Hokkaido, the Kitamaebune trade provided the impetus for several local families to enter the shipping industry and amass significant fortunes. The layout of modern Yunotsu, including its roads and waterways, dates back to this period of affluence. The oldest building is the Naito House, constructed after a fire laid waste to the town in 1747. It was the home of an illustrious family, the head of which was appointed lord of Yunotsu by the Mohri in 1570 and tasked with protecting the silver shipments departing from the nearby port of Okidomari. The Naito family remained a local presence for centuries, operating shipping, *sake* brewing, postal, and other businesses.

While not as historic as the Naito House, most other structures in Yunotsu today are quite old. Many of them date back to the Taisho era (1912–1926), giving the town an old-fashioned charm that is particularly evident after nightfall, when traditional-style lanterns illuminate the narrow streets. Modern-day Yunotsu is also famous for its hot springs; the two *onsen* baths still in business let you experience these rejuvenating waters for yourself.