

Kakunodate Samurai Residences: A Designated Preservation District

Kakunodate is home to a number of stately samurai residences called *bukeyashiki*, that date back to the Edo period (1603–1867). These mansions comprise a preservation district that has long safeguarded the samurai history of this former castle town.

Kakunodate was founded in 1620 by Ashina Yoshikatsu (1575–1631), the younger brother of the ruler of the Akita Domain. Surrounded by mountains on three sides, with the Hinokinaigawa River to the west and the Tamagawa River to the south, it was easy to defend from would-be conquerors, making it an ideal location for a castle town on the northern reaches of the fertile Semboku Plain.

The town's design is noteworthy for its earthen fire wall that separated the samurai residences in the northern part of town, or *uchi-machi* (inner city), from the dwellings of merchants and townspeople in the southern part, or *to-machi* (outer city).

In the northern side of town, thick groves of trees grow around the individual samurai houses that together create a fortress-like collection of buildings. This street of samurai residences is known as Bukeyashiki-dori, and is located between National Highway 46 at the base of Mt. Furushiro and the *hiyoke* earthen fire wall. In September 1976, the national government added this area to the list of Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings.

In addition to the samurai district, Kakunodate is famed for its cherry trees: the elegant weeping cherry trees (*shidare zakura*) along Bukeyashiki-dori, and the light pink blossoms of the *somei yoshino* cherry trees that cover a two-kilometer stretch along the Hinokinaigawa River.