

The Meaning Behind Place Names

Shiobara

Shio means “salt” and *bara*, “field” or “plain.” Shiobara is on a plain in a mountainous region where rock salt was once produced. Another theory about the town’s name is that it refers to the military commander Shiobara Hachirō (dates unknown).

Ooami

Literally, “big net.” This area is known as a place where fish were trapped by the rocks in the river while swimming upstream, allowing them to be caught in large nets suspended from the steep cliffs along the river.

Fukuwata

The wind blows so strongly in this area that people say that, with a tailwind, you can ride a bicycle uphill without even pedaling, as the wind will push you to the top. *Fuku* means “to blow,” and *wata* means “to cross.” However, over time the kanji character for “to blow” was replaced with another character that is pronounced the same but means “good fortune.”

Nodachi Rock

A lord traveling through the area during the Edo period (1603–1868) is said to have made camp on this rock. The word *nodachi* was used to describe the practice of stopping one’s palanquin for a short rest during long journeys.

Shionoyu

Literally, “salt springs.” The hot springs in this area have the highest concentrations of salt of any spring in Shiobara.

Shiogama

Shiobara’s hottest springs. Legend has it that the water was formerly used to heat kettles (*gama*) when distilling salt (*shio*) from the water.

Hataori

Hata means “field for crops,” and *ori* means “below.” This place was named for its location south of—or “below”—a field.

Monzen

Literally, “before the gate.” A community outside the gate of Myōunji Temple.

Furumachi

Literally, “old town.” The oldest town in Shimoshiobara.

Arayu

After an earthquake buried the baths in Motoyu, locals moved their businesses to the springs at Arayu—literally, “new springs.”

Motoyu

Literally, “original springs.” The first *onsen* to be discovered in Shiobara is believed to be located nearby, but the current baths were dug after the original baths were buried in a landslide in 1695.