

Matsuo

The settlement of Matsuo occupies a dramatic location on the west side of Cape Ashizuri, overlooking the sea from the top of steep granite cliffs that were shaped by weathering and erosion. Matsuo is distinguished by houses that are grouped closely together and separated only by narrow alleys. The village flourished in the Edo period (1603–1868), when fishermen from Kishu (present-day Wakayama Prefecture) taught local people how to catch fish in the open sea and how to make *katsuobushi*, smoked and dried fish fillets, long considered an essential ingredient in Japanese cuisine. The people of Matsuo also participated in the maritime trade, and some established successful shipping companies. One of these was run by the Yoshifuku family, whose luxurious Meiji-era (1868–1912) house serves as a reminder of the heyday of the settlement. Another item of interest in Matsuo is the large sea fig tree (*Ficus superba* var. *japonica*) that has stood behind the local Shinto shrine for more than 300 years.