

## History of Tosashimizu

### *A crucial port*

Archaeological findings show that the region of present-day Kochi Prefecture, formerly called Tosa, has been inhabited since prehistoric times, and that people in this area have always looked to the sea for sustenance. The coastal villages in what is now Tosashimizu have traditionally been difficult to reach over land, and so have been particularly dependent on the ocean. From around the fifteenth century onward, the coast on both sides of Cape Ashizuri developed into a key port in the shipping lane connecting both Kyoto (the capital at the time) and the mercantile center of Osaka with Ming China and Southeast Asia. Trading crews docked in Tosashimizu's deep inlets, which provided shelter from the elements, to rest and take on supplies. Shimizu ("clear water"), the town's original name, refers to a local spring that attracted parched seafarers.

### *Flourishing fisheries*

In traditional Japanese geography, Tosa was known as the "far south," an isolated gateway to uncharted waters. Improvements in navigation and shipping techniques, however, gradually made the region more accessible. In the early Edo period (1603–1868), wealthy and well-equipped fishermen from Kishu (present-day Wakayama Prefecture) paid the lords of Tosa for the right to start fishing for skipjack tuna (*katsuo*) off Cape Ashizuri. They taught local people how to catch open-water fish and how to make *katsuobushi*: smoked, dried, and sometimes fermented fish fillets, long considered an essential ingredient in Japanese cuisine.

### *Business booms*

In the 1700s, some people in what is now Tosashimizu started carving out a place for themselves in the maritime trade. These business-savvy entrepreneurs dealt mainly in firewood, seafood, charcoal, and other local products, and amassed considerable fortunes over the years. They built lavish homes and storehouses, decorating their dwellings with Chinese ceramics and other exotic luxuries. They also expanded into the *katsuobushi* business, helping Shimizu dried skipjack tuna earn a reputation as the best in all of Japan.

### *From sea to land*

The lack of flat, arable land in Tosashimizu forced local people to look to the sea for sustenance. Solid ground, however, was not completely overlooked, and ambitious land-use projects were undertaken here long before modern roads made overland travel

possible. From the Edo period (1603–1868) onward, local rulers used coves near central Shimizu for salt production. They also reinforced hillsides with stone and converted the land into terraced fields, which were mainly used to grow sweet potatoes. These fields remained in use until the late 1960s, but have now largely been reclaimed by nature.