

Sagiura Harbor

Sagiura's excellent natural harbor, a sheltered haven on a coast often battered by rough winds and violent waves, has attracted residents for thousands of years. The deep inlet, with its narrow mouth and enclosing hills, offers protection from the wind, while Kashiwa Island, standing guard at the harbor entrance, provides a natural breakwater.

Japan prospered during the middle years of the Edo period (1603–1867). Merchant vessels from Kyoto and Osaka traveled the Sea of Japan, bringing business and wealth to their ports-of-call along the northern coast of the mainland. Sagiura thrived, offering wholesale trade, lodgings, and safe anchorage to sailors awaiting favorable winds in its harbor. Mooring points can still be clearly seen carved into the rocks along the waterfront on the town's west side, some of which were hollowed out to form attachment points for guy-lines.

During the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–1926) eras, Sagiura was visited regularly by Osaka merchant vessels. Boats carrying rice from Tōhoku and Pacific herring and kelp from Hokkaidō brought significant business. At the height of the town's prosperity, around 1888, a shipping agent might have handled operations for more than 100 boats per year.

Today, fishing is the primary occupation of Sagiura's residents, and Sagiura Harbor remains crucial to the local fishing industry. The waters of the Shimane Peninsula produce excellent yellowtail, threeline grunt, Japanese Spanish mackerel, squid, and righteye flounder. Some local fishermen offer guided boat tours of the rugged coastline. Sea caves, grottos, and islets weathered into fantastic shapes dot the coast beneath rugged cliffs, and many of the most breathtaking spots are only accessible by sea.

Between November and July, explorers will likely encounter the harbor's crowds of black-tailed gulls. The gulls, who come to Shimane each year for the breeding season, are distinguishable by their unusual call, which resembles a cat's meow. This is also the source of their Japanese name—*umineko*, meaning “sea cat.”
