

## **Maru Hata**

### **Distinctive round, walled farming fields**

Seen from the air, the farming fields of the Miiraku Peninsula, known as *maru hata* (“round fields”) are quite remarkable: circular and multicolored, they are unlike the squared, symmetrical rice paddies more commonly farmed across Japan. The peninsula, a low region on the northwest coast of Fukue Island, is composed of basaltic lava from flows much younger than those that formed the mountainous shapes of the Goto Group (the original Goto Islands). Lava rock walls or tight growths of *tsubaki* (camellia trees) are used as windbreaks to protect the circular farm fields. Both methods are almost ubiquitous throughout the region, as lava rocks and camellia trees are abundant—camellia oil, used in cosmetics, is a major product of the islands. The fields are surrounded with masonry drains to reduce the loss of soil. While the shapes of the fields are far from typical, modern farm equipment is utilized in their cultivation. Because of poor water supply, however, *satsuma imo*, a kind of sweet potato, is largely grown here instead of rice. Satsuma imo are also used to make *shochu*, a vodka-like drink beloved in Kyushu, at the sole distillery in the Goto Islands.