

Nishi Sanbashi: History of the Western Pier

The tranquil beauty of this pier contrasts sharply with the harsh role it played in the islanders' struggle for survival from the early 1600s. Faced with a ruinous *nintozei* (poll tax) imposed by invaders from Kagoshima's Satsuma domain in 1609, the farmers of Taketomijima, where rice grows poorly, had no choice but to travel by *itafuni* (canoes made from hollowed-out logs) to cultivate fields on Ishigaki Island to the east and Iriomote Island to the west. They set out from *Nishi Sanbashi*, making slow passage, singing *yunta* (work songs) and *ayo* (ritual songs). After the harvest, the pier would be piled high with straw bags of rice. The *nintozei* lasted until 1902 and is remembered for the great suffering brought upon the community. In 2005, the *Nishi Sanbashi* was declared a Registered Tangible Cultural Property of Japan.

An abundance of sea life populates the area around the pier. Small *iidako* (octopuses) dig burrows in the sand and wait to catch *minamisunagani* (smooth-handed ghost crabs). *Kasumiaji* (Bluefin trevally), the island's representative large carnivorous fish, dart through the shallows chasing schools of fish. In the evening, visitors can bask in the day's residual warmth from the pier structure while enjoying the spectacular sunsets over Iriomote. After sunset, the view of the night sky can be breathtaking.