

### **Hamasaki Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings**

Hamasaki was the main port of Hagi Castle Town during the early part of the Edo period (1603–1867). It is located at the northeast tip of the delta, where the Matsumoto River meets the Japan Sea. Hagi was the capital of Chōshū domain, and as the town flourished under the rule of the Mōri family, Hamasaki grew as well. The town was an important stop for the *kitamaebune* trading ships that traveled along the coastal route from the commercial hub of Osaka, through the Straits of Shimonoseki, and up the Japan Sea coast to Hokkaido and back. The traders would anchor at Hamasaki with their cargoes of sake, salt, and other merchandise on both legs of their journey. Hagi's wealth came from trading with the merchant ships and from the region's abundant fisheries.

During the Meiji era (1868–1912), the processed seafood industry grew rapidly in Hamasaki, and the area around the port became the undisputed commercial center of Hagi. In particular, Hamasaki is still known for Japanese horse mackerel, swordtip squid, and red tilefish. By the mid-twentieth century, however, Hamasaki's economic fortunes had declined considerably. After World War II ended with Japan's surrender, Hagi's industries came to a standstill, and although the city had been spared from bombing, its various industries were laid low. People moved out of Hagi, seeking work in larger cities as the country began to recover. Around the end of the twentieth century, the buildings of Hamasaki were recognized for their historical significance and cultural value. Research into the port's past began in earnest in 1998, and Hamasaki was designated an "Important Preservation District for a Group of Traditional Buildings" in 2001.

Today, over 100 buildings are preserved as part of the historical district. Of these, 44 were built before 1868. Most remain in an excellent state of repair, and a considerable number have been repurposed for modern use. Having escaped the ravages of war, natural disasters, and modern developers, the Hamasaki District is a uniquely important site in Hagi and a window into Japan's architectural history.

Most of Hamasaki's historic buildings line Honmachi-suji, the area's main thoroughfare. The center of town was the Hamasaki Magistrate's Office, which, according to a map of Hagi Castle Town made sometime between 1720 and 1740, unusually faced the sea. This was presumably to allow the magistrate to survey the "seven islands and seven bays" that made up his jurisdiction. The same map features illustrations of the enormous *kurayashiki*, or storehouse-residences, that lined

Honmachi-suji and opened toward the bay. The area around Honmachi-suji is also known as a *fukiage* (literally, a “raised up” area), as it occupies a ridge well above sea level. Much of Hamasaki today is the result of land reclamation projects undertaken at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Former Domain Boathouse, the only surviving example of a tile-roofed stone boathouse in Japan, was originally on the waterfront, but land reclamation has turned the area into *terra firma*, and the boathouse now sits across the street from urban residences.

Many of the historical buildings in Hamasaki are still family homes, or were so until relatively recently. These include the residences of the Yamamura, Yamanaka, Fujii, Suko, Saitō, and Tanaka families. The Umeya Shichibei house was home to a colorful Meiji-era figure who risked his life to run 1,000 guns from Shanghai to Chōshū domain during the last years of the Edo period. Shichibei was also an aesthete who studied tea ceremony at the Kobori Enshū School in Kyoto.

Tourist information is available at the Former Yamamura Family Residence.

Google Maps link: [here](#)

Former Yamamura/Yamanaka Estate

Address: 77 Hamasaki, Hagi, Yamaguchi

Phone: 0838-22-0133

Open: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (daily)

Admission Free

Access: 3-minute walk from Ofunagura Iriguchi Bus stop (Hagi Junkan Māru Bus Eastbound)