

Mishima: The Flat Volcanic Island

Located 44 kilometers off the coast of Hagi, the island of Mishima was created by a volcanic eruption 2 million years ago—around the same time that the Japan Sea came into being. The flat-topped island has been inhabited for over a thousand years. Today, it is known for its ancient rice paddies and *Mishima-ushi* beef cattle. The landscape is truly ancient, and the remote island retains its distinct culture.

Hagi Castle Town: A History Built on Magma

Nestled between the sea and the rivers, Hagi was developed into a castle town by the Mōri family during the Edo period (1603–1867). The historic town where samurai proudly strolled the streets was built above swirling magma. The town was built on the sandbar created by the Abu River and Mt. Shizuki, a dormant volcano. The stone walls that define the townscape were built using chunks of igneous rock cut from the nearby dormant volcano, Mt. Kasayama. Modern Hagi's cityscape conceals the secrets of a volcanic past hidden beneath our feet.

Hagi Ōkan Highway: A Path Across an Ancient Caldera

This road was constructed to facilitate the compulsory journeys to and from Edo (now Tokyo) that the daimyo made every other year, a practice called *sankin kōtai*, or “alternate attendance.” Lodgings and other businesses were established along the road to cater to the daimyo and his procession. But the daimyo and his retinue were unaware that the land that they walked on was created by a huge explosion 100 million years ago. The post town of Sasanami-ichi, the second stop on the road, was built in the middle of an ancient caldera. Walking the town's historic streets today, it is hard to imagine that once upon a time, they were the caldera of a gigantic volcano.