

Karatsu Kaido Harumachi

Harumachi is a historical townscape on the Karatsu Kaido highway, a roughly 100-kilometer-long road connecting Karatsu in Saga Prefecture with Kitakyushu in Fukuoka Prefecture.

The Karatsu Kaido was one of the major roads through Kyushu in the Edo period (1603–1867). It was used by daimyo lords, who were required to attend the shogun and live in Edo (modern-day Tokyo) every other year, demonstrating their loyalty to the government.

While much of the road has been modernized, a few stretches retain a historical atmosphere. Harumachi is one such area, with its variety of restored buildings from the Edo period, Meiji era (1868–1912), and Taisho era (1912–1926). Some of the old houses now serve as shops and restaurants. Kaido Soba Takarai is a soba restaurant in a restored 150-year-old house, and Rakuichi Rakuza is an antique shop in a grand Taisho-era residence.

Harumachi is the birthplace of two renowned postwar painters, the brothers Nakamura Ken'ichi (1895–1967) and Nakamura Takuji (1897–1988). Both specialized in Western figurative painting. Their childhood home, built in 1907, has been restored as a private museum.

Through local conservation efforts, many of the older buildings have been preserved or renovated to retain the traditional character of the area. The historic Harumachi section of the Karatsu Kaido is marked by a large wooden lantern and a map of the buildings of interest.