

***Zen no Sato* (Hometown of Zen)**

The neighborhood of Shihi, located near the entrance to Eihei-ji Temple, is known as the “Hometown of Zen” (*Zen no Sato*). It has long been intricately connected with the temple. For much of the area’s history, it was actually two separate villages, one of which was known for carpenters who specialized in temple construction. While the origins of the settlement are not known, one of the first residents may have been Kuro no Hanjō, an architect from China who came to Japan in 1227 with Zen Master Dōgen (1200–1253). Temple construction is done using mostly wooden materials, and the community of carpenters played a vital role in maintaining the various halls of the temple compound.

Like many rural areas of Japan, Shihi faces an uncertain future in Japan’s aging society, where citizens of age 65 and above account for more than 43 percent of the population. In cooperation with Eihei-ji Temple and local governmental organizations, the neighborhood has undertaken several revitalization initiatives to preserve the historic landscape of the area and ensure that visitors can experience the Hometown of Zen for years to come. Major projects include the establishment of Hakujukan, an inn that combines modern accommodations with authentic Zen practice, and the reconstruction of the historic temple approach that follows the Eihei-ji River. In addition to constructing a new tourist information center staffed by local volunteers, the neighborhood has worked to develop the *Zen no Sato* mobile app, which guides users through the area of Eihei-ji Temple in both Japanese and English.

After leaving the temple, visitors can stroll along a street lined with restaurants and souvenir shops. The area is best known for *shōjin ryōri*, a type of Buddhist vegetarian cuisine. *Goma-dōfu*, a dish with a tofu-like texture that is made from kudzu starch, water, and ground sesame paste, is frequently served with this type of food as a meat substitute. The restaurants also serve many other local specialties, such as Eihei-ji soba, a dish of thick, chewy buckwheat noodles in warm broth that is often topped with grated *yamaimo*. Two more popular dishes are “sauce *katsudon*,” a bowl of rice topped with a fried pork cutlet and covered in a sauce similar to Worcestershire, and *oroshi* soba, buckwheat noodles in a cold soup mixed with grated daikon and garnished with chopped spring onions and bonito flakes.

Fukui Prefecture is known for a variety of traditional crafts, which are available for purchase at galleries along the shopping street. Echizen ware is one of Fukui’s most well-

known traditional crafts. This style of pottery features a natural glaze produced by covering each item in firewood ash before firing it in the kiln. The final products are quite sturdy and have been commonly used since the medieval period (between the twelfth to sixteenth centuries), earning the Echizen region recognition as one of the “six ancient kilns” of Japan.

Wakasa lacquered chopsticks are another popular Fukui souvenir. These are produced in the nearby city of Obama, which manufactures 80 percent of all lacquered chopsticks in the country. The chopsticks are elaborately decorated with eggshells, seashells, and pine needles. Many of the local goods sold as souvenirs feature Eibō-kun, a local mascot character who resembles a monk wearing a traditional *sugegasa* hat in the shape of a sweet onion, a specialty of the area.