

## Sakamoto Area

The town of Sakamoto in the northern part of Otsu has served as a gateway to Enryakuji Temple and Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine for hundreds of years. Saicho (767–822), the priest who founded Enryakuji at the top of Mt. Hiei, was born in Sakamoto. The town is also at one end of the Sakamoto Cable Car, which runs to Enryakuji and is the longest cable car route in Japan.

Sakamoto retains many of its historic buildings and all of its old-fashioned charm. The area is easily reached by train and is best explored on foot. The main street leading to Hiyoshi Taisha is flanked by small temples and *satobo*, retirement residences for older monks who had trained at Enryakuji. The distinctive, rough stone walls of these buildings are of a special style perfected by local Ano stoneworkers. Beside Sakamoto-Hiezanguchi Station on the Keihan Line is the Hiyoshi Tea Garden, believed to have been planted by Saicho, who is credited with bringing tea to Japan, and hence the garden is thought to be the oldest tea plantation in Japan.

The main shopping street is filled with old timber storefronts with traditional *battari shogi* folding wooden benches out the front. There is also a range of restaurants selling local specialties, including soba noodles. Side streets and alleyways lead to unexpected places, from hidden mountain paths to quiet graveyards.