

### **Former Bito Residence**

The Bito residence was built between 1863 and 1865, and four generations of the family lived here until 1980. Descended from samurai, the Bitos were a wealthy merchant family involved in silk wholesale in the Kaya region since the turn of the eighteenth century. Over the years, the family became engaged in the soy sauce trade, domestic shipping, insurance, the local railroad, and banking. In 1928, the eleventh-generation family head, Bito Shozo XI, began serving his first of two terms as town mayor and oversaw construction of the Kaya Town Hall.

The Bito residence has approximately 1,000 square meters of floor space, which makes it the largest residence in the Kaya region. During construction, materials were recycled from buildings nearby, and the main structure of the house, originally that of the Wataya Choemon residence in northern Hyogo Prefecture, was brought by ship to its current location. The home includes a storefront, storerooms, rooms for entertaining guests, gardens, and living quarters. It would have been bustling with business when Chirimen Kaido street, where the house is located, was flourishing. The front parlor was used to greet customers, while weavers and servants worked in the numerous rooms throughout the residence.

The house is in a state similar to its original condition. Thick, fireproof walls line the main storeroom, *engawa* corridors open onto the gardens, and ornamental *hikite* finger-hold fittings adorn sliding doors throughout the house. Western-style rooms added in the early twentieth century still have their original wooden furnishings. Seasonal Bito family heirlooms, clothing, and other articles are displayed throughout the year.