

Takehara City

Takehara rose to fame during the Edo period (1603–1867) and Meiji era (1868–1912) as one of Japan's leading salt and sake producers. It sits in a sheltered bay facing the Seto Inland Sea, in the south-central part of Hiroshima Prefecture.

Takehara became a large-scale manufacturer of salt in the early Edo period. The town's salt was shipped along two routes: to Osaka and then on to Edo (present-day Tokyo), and to Akita and Hokkaido prefectures in the north along the Sea of Japan in *kitamaebune* trading ships via the Kanmon Straits (separating Honshu and Kyushu). The ships returned with rice, which was also an important commodity during this period.

In 2019, Takehara was designated a Japan heritage site as a port of call for *kitamaebune* ships.

Takehara's success in the salt business is evidenced in the number of well-preserved merchant houses and warehouses in its historic district.

Because salt production was mainly a summer activity—involving the evaporation of seawater under the sun's intense rays—merchants sought roles for their workers during the winter. Many began sake brewing.

Today, only three well-established sake breweries remain. They have been in operation for more than 150 years, carrying on the traditional local methods of making sake. Takehara is the birthplace of Masataka Taketsuru (1894–1979), the founder of the Nikka Whisky Distilling Company.

Takehara is blessed with bountiful nature and a warm climate typical of regions near the Seto Inland Sea. It is a scenic spot, comprising the ocean, mountains, rivers, and glowing coastal skies. Rai Sanyo (1780–1832), a prominent local Confucian scholar, historian, artist, and poet, coined the expression *sanshi suihaku* (purple mountains; light shimmering on the water) to describe the scenery of the Seto Inland Sea as seen from Takehara at dusk.