

Chisago Breakwater and Lighthouse

During the nineteenth century, Mitarai's dominance as a port town was threatened by the development of an increasing number of rival harbors across the region. The dominant sea route also changed, and ships that once hopped from port to port along the southern coast of Honshu instead followed the northern coast of Shikoku, approaching Mitarai from the southeast rather than the northeast. To attract ships sailing this new route, Mitarai added a breakwater on the south side of its harbor. Funding from the Hiroshima domain for this large-scale construction project was repeatedly delayed, and Mitarai finally completed the breakwater in 1829 by funding it through a locally organized lottery, which had been legalized just a few years before.

The Chisago Breakwater is 120 meters in length, the largest breakwater in the Chūgoku region. The breakwater was also technologically advanced for its time: the builders employed *gobōzumi*, a method used to build castle ramparts, in which large, uncut stones are stacked together without mortar. A curved wall was added to the outside of the breakwater to reduce the impact of the waves. In 1830, Sumiyoshi Jinja Shrine was built as a guardian shrine for the breakwater to add another dimension of protection for the harbor. The well-engineered breakwater remains in use today, having withstood the test of time and many typhoons.

A number of lighthouses have stood at the tip of the breakwater to guide ships approaching Mitarai. The first lighthouse was a wooden structure, but it was badly damaged by a series of storms. In 1832, a stronger, stone lighthouse funded by the Kaneko merchant family replaced the wooden one. The new lighthouse was 6 meters high and built in the traditional stone-lantern style. This stone lighthouse remained in use until 1879, when it was relocated to the path leading to Sumiyoshi Jinja. In its place, a concrete lighthouse now occupies the tip of the breakwater. It was built in a style that replicates the architecture of the original stone lighthouse.

The large stones lining the breakwater are used for securing ships, and they have kanji numerals carved into them. At the foot of the breakwater wall, a turtle and a crane have been carved into the stone. Both animals are symbols of prosperity and longevity, and together they express hope for Mitarai's prosperity as a port town for many years to come. Touching these carved stones is said to bring good fortune. The Chisago Breakwater and its lighthouse are important symbols of Mitarai's past and present, and the view over the harbor still looks much as it did during the Edo period (1603–1867).