

## **The Town of Nakamura—Little Kyoto**

The town of Nakamura became an important political and economic center in Shikoku in the fifteenth century, following an exodus of nobles and artisans from Kyoto. They settled in the city of Shimanto after a violent power struggle started in Kyoto, then the capital, which set off civil strife around the country.

### *A noble beginning*

The bond between Nakamura and Kyoto started when Ichijo Norifusa (1423–1480), a court noble and chief advisor to the emperor, moved back here to his ancestral land. He left Kyoto after the outbreak of the Onin War (1467–1477), which started as a violent power struggle over control of the ruling Ashikaga shogunate in Kyoto and escalated into a civil war. When Norifusa moved to Nakamura, he brought his retinue and the culture of Kyoto with him.

The site of Nakamura Castle in Tamematsu Park overlooks the town. Nakamura Castle was demolished in 1615 under an edict from the Tokugawa shogunate that there could only be one castle in each domain. Kochi Castle was appointed the center of power for the Tosa domain (present-day Kochi Prefecture). The current structure was built in 1973 and houses the Shimanto City Museum. The area nearest to the castle, Sakuramachi, is a former samurai district. There are signs in several languages that indicate the sites of former homes of high-ranking samurai and officials.

### *Ties to Kyoto*

Some districts of Nakamura share names with the ancient capital, such as Gion and Higashiyama. During the Daimonji Okuribi (Daimonji Farewell Fires Event) in mid-July, a festival that originates in Kyoto, torches are lit on Mt. Judaiji to create the kanji character *dai* (large). This marks the end of the Obon season, an important Buddhist holiday honoring the spirits of ancestors. The festival is believed to have started in Nakamura in the Edo period (1603–1867) and has become a popular tradition.

### *Legend of the wisteria*

Ichijo Shrine honors the Ichijo family and is located near the former family residence. A large wisteria vine to the left of the shrine steps is said to have been planted by the Ichijo family hundreds of years before the shrine was built.

According to a local legend, when governor Ichijo Kanesada (1543–1585) moved away from Nakamura, he composed a poem in which he asks the wisteria not to bloom until the day he could return. Kanesada never returned to Nakamura, and the wisteria flowers stopped blooming for over 300 years. However, when the flowers suddenly bloomed again in 1861, the community decided to build Ichijo Shrine.

The Fuji Matsuri (Wisteria Festival) is held to commemorate the Ichijo family each year in early May when the wisteria is in full bloom. The festival includes a procession of local residents dressed in period costumes, reenacting Norifusa's arrival in Nakamura in 1468.

### *Working with the river*

The Shimanto River and its tributaries provide a favorable environment for agriculture. Innovative irrigation techniques have been used in Nakamura since the Edo period (1603–1867) when water wheels were constructed to irrigate the surrounding rice fields. A few traditional water wheels are still in use, but most have been replaced by modern pumps. The Yasunami Water Wheels comprise 15 full-sized working replicas. From late May, around 500 hydrangea bushes bloom near the water wheels.