

Takasago History Tour 1

Takasago's scenic coastal setting has been a popular attraction since before the Heian period (794–1185).

In 1600, daimyo Ikeda Terumasa (1565–1613) was granted rule over the Himeji domain within Harima province (part of present-day Hyogo Prefecture). The domain was considered wealthy since it was producing 520,000 *koku* (78 million kilograms) of rice, an important commodity and currency of the time, every year. Ikeda ordered the construction of Himeji Castle and other parts of the growing town of Himeji. He played a leading role in Takasago's development, including building the port and the Horikawa canal, which drew the Kakogawa River into Takasago.

During the Edo period (1603–1867), Takasago was one of the most important cities of the domain. This was due to its location, thriving fishing industry, and rice production, all of which made it prosper as a distribution center for commodities transported via the Kakogawa River.

Hyakkengura Warehouses

In 1605, two warehouses (*kura*) were built in Takasago. Their total length of about *hyaku* (100) *ken* (a historic unit of length equivalent to 182 meters) resulted in their name: *hyakkengura*. All the goods that went down the Kakogawa River were brought to Takasago, and the warehouses became the site where goods belonging to the Himeji domain and the annual tax of rice collected from the northern and eastern parts of the Harima province were stored. At first, the warehouses could hold nearly five million kilograms of rice, but by the end of the Edo period, they had been expanded to hold approximately six million kilograms.

Today, a stone monument inscribed with this information stands at the site of the former warehouses.

Site of the Kawaguchi Guardhouse

Around 1605, Ikeda ordered the Kawaguchi Guardhouse built at the entrance of Takasago Port. The guardhouse was under the direct control of the Himeji domain, with officials stationed there to observe cargo ships entering Takasago and to monitor marine traffic. Two

clan officials and five regular guards worked in shifts day and night.

A tile with the Ikeda family crest marks the site.

Takasago

Ikeda encouraged the production of handicrafts. Working in these supportive conditions, local craftsman Ozaki Shobei invented a double-stencil technique for use in dyeing silk kimono. The method was used to make patterns depicting the “Aioi no Matsu” (twin pines) of Takasago Jinja Shrine and the legend of the old couple, Jo and Uba, who are the spirits of the two pines and who represent marital happiness and longevity. The dyeing technique became known as Takasago-zome (Takasago dyeing); it was highly esteemed during the Edo period. Items made using this dyeing technique were presented as gifts to the shogun.

In the Meiji era (1868–1912), cotton came to be more commonly used than silk. Then, around the Taisho era (1912–1926), dyeing methods that reduced costs and labor were introduced; these both resulted in the decline of Takasago-zome. By the beginning of the Showa era (1926–1989), the craft had been nearly abandoned.

In the twenty-first century, workshops and other activities to revive Takasago-zome were initiated, and the craft began to be celebrated once again. A sign in front of the Ozaki family residence (Takasago) in Kajiya-cho marks the site as the birthplace of Takasago-zome.

Enmeiji Oribe Lantern

Oribe lanterns were designed by Furuta Oribe (1544–1615), a daimyo and tea master. They were made of granite, with the upper part made to look like a cross and the bottom part with legs that are wide apart. Oribe lanterns were placed in tea gardens during the Edo period.

These lanterns may have been used for votive reasons, for lighting, or for viewing. Perhaps because of the cross motif, it is believed that Oribe lanterns may have been secretly used for worship by Edo-period Christians, as Christianity was strictly prohibited at that time. Oribe lanterns are therefore also known as *kirishitan* (Christian) lanterns.

Kawajizo

The statue of the seated *kawajizo* (guardian) represents Takuhi Daigongen, the deity of safe navigation. The *kawajizo* is said to be a figure of the Oki Islands in Shimane Prefecture, and was installed to ensure the safety of shipowners at sea.

In 2015, the *kawajizo* was registered as a Takasago City Hometown Cultural Asset, and in 2020, a hall was built to house it in its current location. Local residents continue to make offerings and pray there.