

## **Guided Walking Tours of the Hagi Okan**

Walk sections of the historic Hagi Okan highway with a guide from the Hagi Okan Storytellers Association (Hagi Okan Kataribe no Kai). Tours can be fully customized for fitness level and interest, and typically include scenic, cultural, and historical sites such as bamboo groves, Shinto shrines, and Edo-period (1603–1867) merchant homes.

Guides introduce the history of the Hagi Okan against the backdrop of the Choshu domain (modern-day Yamaguchi Prefecture) and the politics of the Edo period. The four most popular routes cover individual sections of the 53-kilometer highway between Hagi in the north and Mitajiri in the south. They range between 2.5 and 12.5 kilometers and take from 2 to 4 hours to complete.

Route A starts in the castle town of Hagi and passes a museum dedicated to Yoshida Shoin (1830–1859), a samurai and scholar who helped lay the foundation for the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This historic event marked the end of the political authority of the shogunate and the restoration of sovereign power to the emperor. Route B connects the old towns of Akiragi and Sasanami, and includes an original stone paved section of the highway.

Sites along Route C include an area where the processions of the lords of the Choshu domain traveling to the capital in Edo (modern-day Tokyo) would rest on their journeys. It is a particularly scenic route along one of the steepest sections of the highway, on the edge of the present-day city of Yamaguchi. Route D runs through what is now the city of Hofu. It starts at Hofu Tenmangu, an ancient shrine founded in the tenth century, and ends at Eiunso, a villa near the port at Mitajiri. The lord of Choshu and his retinue stayed overnight at the villa, then continued their journey to Edo by boat as far as Osaka.

The Hagi Okan was developed by the Mori family, the daimyo of the Choshu domain, after the construction of Hagi Castle in 1604. The road connected the lands ruled by the Mori family and allowed transport and trade between the coasts of the Sea of Japan and the Seto Inland Sea. Exploring this historic route offers insight into the history of Yamaguchi Prefecture and the culture of the Edo period.