

Hagi Okan—A Historic Highway

Sections of a historic highway established in the early seventeenth century remain between the cities of Hagi, Yamaguchi, and Hofu in Yamaguchi Prefecture. Walking tours trace the Hagi Okan highway through town centers, rural farming communities, and along narrow stone paved paths over forested mountain passes. Exploring this route offers insight into the history of Yamaguchi Prefecture and the culture of the Edo period (1603–1867).

The highway was developed by the Mori family, the rulers of the Choshu domain (present-day Yamaguchi Prefecture) after the construction of Hagi Castle in 1604. The Hagi Okan road connected the lands ruled by the Mori family and improved transport and trade between the Sea of Japan and the Seto Inland Sea.

From 1635, the lords of Choshu spent alternate years in Hagi and the capital Edo (modern-day Tokyo) as part of the performance of alternate attendance (*sankinkotai*) enforced by the Tokugawa shogunate. They traveled with their retainers in large processions along the Hagi Okan from the castle in Hagi to Mitajiri, a port in the modern-day city of Hofu where they boarded boats for their onward journey. After residing in the capital for a year, they returned to Hagi.

The Hagi Okan is approximately 53 kilometers, and the highest point is Itado Pass (537 m). The 2.5-kilometer section of the highway from Tenge-sakaguchi in Yamaguchi City to Itado Pass on the border with Hagi City is particularly scenic and passes historical landmarks such as the sites of tea houses where people stopped to rest.