

Tenge-sakaguchi

Tenge-sakaguchi is the beginning of the steepest section of the historic Hagi Okan highway. The walk from Tenge-sakaguchi to Itado Pass via the Rokken-jaya Tea Houses site is one of the most popular along the Hagi Okan, with scenery of terraced fields and forested mountainsides. The route covers the highway for around 2.5 kilometers and takes about 2 hours to complete. Guides for tours of the old highway can be arranged through the Hagi Okan Storytellers Association (Hagi Okan Kataribe no Kai).

The Hagi Okan was developed by the Mori family, the rulers of the Choshu domain (present-day Yamaguchi Prefecture), after the construction of Hagi Castle in 1604. It connected the lands ruled by the Mori family for 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 practice of alternate attendance at the shogun's castle (*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.

These processions numbered around 1,000 members, and included retainers, bodyguards, and servants. Historical records indicate that the largest was made up of 1,663 people. The lord rode in a palanquin carried by four to six bearers. The highway was typically 4 meters wide but narrowed in the mountains at places like Itado Pass.