

## Buzen Kaido

The historic highway known as the Buzen Kaido passes many of Yamaga's major landmarks and attests to the city's vibrant past as a center of commerce and culture. The thoroughfare originally stretched from Kumamoto Castle in the south to the port of Kokura (present-day Kitakyushu City) in the north. The Buzen Kaido flourished during the Edo period (1603–1867) due to the practice of *sankin-kotai*, a policy whereby regional daimyo lords were required to travel to the capital, Edo (present-day Tokyo), and reside there in alternate years. Yamaga was the first major stop on the route northward from the city of Kumamoto, and prospered as a result.

### *A main artery of history and culture*

The Buzen Kaido in Yamaga runs from the banks of the Kikuchi River through the heart of town. Major local landmarks including the bathhouse Sakura-yu, the Yamaga Lantern Folk Art Museum, and the Yachiyoza Theater are located along its route. The Kikuchi River was an important waterway for domestic trade during the Edo period, when rice grown in Kyushu was transported to Osaka via the river. Businesses related to rice production, such as sake breweries and rice cracker shops, flourished on the Buzen Kaido in Yamaga. Some of the shops still operating today were founded in the Edo period. The architecture and ambience of this street offer a glimpse of life in the local community centuries ago.

### *Celebrations take center stage*

The neighborhoods surrounding the Buzen Kaido are especially lively during annual festivals, as the street is a major thoroughfare for processions. At the Yamaga Onsen Festival in April, the Buzen Kaido is an exuberant spectacle of dance, *taiko* drumming, and other performances. During the Yamaga Lantern Festival in August and the Yamaga Lantern Romance events in February, the streets are filled with hundreds of colorful lanterns, handmade umbrellas, and bamboo candle holders.

### *Rest and recreation on the Buzen Kaido*

The Buzen Kaido has plenty of cafes and restaurants for lunch, dinner, or a midday snack. Some of the establishments here serve the local delicacy of *basashi* (thinly

sliced raw horse meat). The hot springs at Sakura-yu, boutiques specializing in fermented food products, and stores selling traditional Japanese sweets (*wagashi*) are among the businesses that line the street.

Guided tours of the Buzen Kaido are available with advance booking. Some include rickshaw rides, others visit historic sites along the ancient highway such as Sakura-yu and the Yachiyoza Theater. There are also food-focused tours, where visitors can sample various rice-related products such as sake, miso, and rice crackers. For those interested in Yamaga's craft culture, interactive experiences and workshops at local boutiques offer lessons in how to make dolls, miniature lanterns, naturally dyed fabrics, and more.