

## **Kinkotsu Footpath**

The narrow lanes and back alleys of Gero's Kanayama district are a portal into the past, every residence and storefront brimming with local history and culture. The maze-like streetscape is known as the Kinkotsu Footpath. *Kinkotsu* denotes “muscle and bones” and refers to the interconnected nature of these sinewy passages, as though the entire town were a living organism.

### **A town at the crossroads**

Kanayama is located at the confluence of the Hida and Maze Rivers. In the Edo period (1603–1867), the town flourished as a relay station between four domains and was situated at the border between the historical provinces of Hida and Mino, both part of present-day Gifu Prefecture. This location made the town an important hub for regional travel and commerce.

### **Getting oriented**

The Kinkotsu Footpath winds all over the townscape, from the JR Hida-Kanayama Station east of the Hida River to the maze of streets and alleyways on the west side. The official map can be obtained at the train station and shows a meandering path in red that passes by many of Kanayama's most significant historical, cultural, and commercial sites.

As you walk, you will discover building exteriors from the Taisho (1912–1926) and early Showa (1926–1945) eras. The Kinkotsu Footpath is an unconventional itinerary, sometimes directing you to slip through a narrow gap between buildings or duck your head to pass beneath old residential structures that span both sides of a creek.

### **A labyrinth of discovery**

A defunct public bath that closed in 1988 is on the west side. Its interior remains accessible, the decor and signage a time capsule of the mid-twentieth century. The route leads to nearby Mt. Chinju, a small mountain renowned for its colorful autumn leaves. The mountain affords views of Kanayama and has a Buddhist hall dedicated to Kannon, a deity of compassion, and a statue of Ryomen Sukuna, a legendary warrior of ancient times.

In this area west of the Hida River, the footpath passes local fixtures like a sake brewery, a gallery, an antique shop, and boutiques that specialize in pastries and Japanese sweets.

Other segments weave around backstreets and down stone staircases. A three-story structure called Seisuiro stands out in the townscape as another relic frozen in time. The Kanayama Megaliths Research Center, meanwhile, is a contemporary institution that collects resources and materials related to the local megaliths.

### **Other landmarks of note**

A small section of the Kinkotsu Footpath leads across the Sakai Bridge over the Maze River. At the end of the bridge is a plaque that commemorates the work of cartographer Ino Tadataka (1745–1818), famed for completing the first modern map of Japan. Ino began his survey of the historical Hida Province at this location in 1814.

Another path, from the train station to the Hida River, leads to the site of a former ferry landing, now a scenic spot overlooking the water. Prior to the construction of the nearby Kanayama Bridge in 1928, local communities relied on boat transportation to cross between the eastern area by the train station and the western commercial district.

### **Guided tours**

English-language tours are available and last from approximately 90 to 120 minutes. A knowledgeable local guide can ensure that you don't miss out on any of the hidden treasures of the Kinkotsu Footpath.