

## **Former Moji Customs House**

Moji's role as an international trading port necessitated the opening of a branch office of the Nagasaki Customs House in 1889. Moji soon began to receive more traffic than Nagasaki itself, and in 1909 the branch office was expanded to become a full customs house. The brick building that stands today was constructed in 1912 to replace the original customs house, which had burnt down two years earlier.

As the oldest of Moji's historic buildings, the Former Customs House has suffered the ravages of war and disuse. Its roof was destroyed in the 1945 Moji air raid, and for many years it stood boarded up and empty. Beginning in 1991, the building was restored to its original appearance and reopened in 1995 as part of the Mojikō Retro historic district. The Former Moji Customs House now serves as a rest space with a fruit-themed café and an area dedicated to showcasing Japan's modern customs and excise systems. It is both a chic public space and an enduring symbol of a past era.

The design was overseen by Tsumaki Yorinaka (1859–1916), a renowned architect of the Meiji era (1868–1912). The spired dormer windows and carved stone cornices along the roof, as well as the chandeliers inside, are typical features of Neo-Renaissance-style architecture.

The interior walls were once covered in white stucco, but this was later removed to expose the original, century-old brickwork underneath. Close inspection of the walls reveals charred wooden blocks inserted at regular intervals among the bricks. Nails could be driven into these blocks to anchor timbers or framing for doors and windows. It is thought that the wood was deliberately charred to keep out insects and rot.

### *Echoes of a Thriving Port*

The building's size and ornamentation reflect the port's former status. Moji began as a small village of fishers and saltmakers, but it grew rapidly after its 1889 designation as a special trading port for coal and other goods. By 1896, it had become the country's leading exporter of coal, and some 580,000 metric tons of it were shipped out of Moji during that year alone. Moji became a fully open port in 1899, and by 1907, it accounted for more than a twentieth by value of all basic commodities imported into Japan.

### *Customs and Excise Today*

Exhibits on the building's first floor introduce modern customs policies designed to prevent smuggling. There are displays depicting illegal drugs that officials look for, the many ways that smugglers have tried to hide them (such as inside shoes, shampoo bottles, and statues), and examples of confiscated animal-derived products.

The observation space on the third floor, in the corner facing the water, provides clear views of Moji's current waterfront and sections of the Mojikō Retro historic district.