

Mojikō Station

Moji: Gateway to Japan and the World

Since 1891, Mojikō Station has connected Kyushu to the Japanese mainland and the world at large. Its symmetrical, Neo-Renaissance design is reminiscent of a gateway, reflecting the role it has played for over a century. In the years since its construction, the station has been relocated, renamed, and renovated, but it endures as a symbol of Moji's prosperity at the turn of the twentieth century.

Spurred by Moji Port's rapid development, in 1914 the city demolished the old station building and erected a new building closer to the water, where it stands today. Though originally called "Moji Station," it was renamed in April 1942 to become *Mojikō* (Moji Port). This name change coincided with the opening of the Kanmon Tunnel, which linked Kyushu's railroad to Japan's main island of Honshu.

European Architectural Influence

Although the two-story wooden structure appears to be clad in stone, it is actually covered in a layer of mortar that has been shaped to resemble stone cladding. The mansard roof, decorative ironwork, and pilasters flanking the main entrance are all features of Neo-Renaissance architecture, which became popular in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. The presence of these European elements hints at the influence that Western design had on Japanese architects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A Once-Bustling Station

Mojikō Station underwent six years of extensive renovation before reopening in 2019. Today, it serves as both a public train station and a physical testament to Moji's identity at the turn of the 1900s. The station retains many of its twentieth-century features, such as the elegant mantelpiece and fireplace in the ticket office, formerly the waiting lounge for first- and second-class ticket holders. Third-class passengers waited across the main hall, in a room that is now a café. Staircases near the entrance lead to the second floor, where there was once a special lounge for important visitors and an annex for their servants. These prestigious passengers were served European cuisine at Mikado Shokudō, a restaurant run by the same company that operated the trains' dining cars. The luxurious furnishings and elegant interior are now part of an exhibit on the historic station.

Mementos of Mojikō's Past

Mojikō Station played a vital role as Kyushu's overland connection to Moji Port, and by extension, to the world at large. Millions of people have come and gone from the port, and some of them have become the subjects of stories that are still repeated today:

Ikeda Utako and the "Mirror of Pride"

In the northwest wing, a large, ornate mirror hangs alongside a placard detailing the story of Ikeda Utako. In August 1945, World War II had just ended, and Japan had begun to withdraw its troops from overseas. Soldiers and citizens poured into Moji, and throngs of people arriving at the station waited for hours to pack themselves onto trains. Among them was a pregnant traveler named Utako, who went into labor on the platform. Night had already fallen when her water broke, and all the local doctors had already closed their clinics, so a member of the station staff escorted Utako to his own house, carrying her three-year-old child on his back. With the help of a neighbor, he safely delivered the baby. Utako named her newborn boy "Samonji," written using the kanji characters for "Moji."

As an adult, Ikeda Samonji donated the "Mirror of Pride" to the station in 1971. It was his hope that station staff would look at their reflections and feel a sense of pride in their work.

The Fountain of Homecoming Water

A fountain in front of the old washroom by the platforms is another lingering reminder of the many travelers who passed through the station. It is labeled *kaeri mizu*, or "homecoming water." This fountain is where returning soldiers and repatriated Japanese citizens from the colonies could wash off the steamship soot and the dust of travel and take their first drinks of water on home soil.