

Sakaemachi Gintengai Shopping Street

A major feature of Japan's urban landscape is the *shōtengai*, a street lined with shops and marked by a decorated arch at each end. These shopping streets are usually near main transport hubs, are closed to vehicles during the day, and are roofed to facilitate all-weather shopping. *Shōtengai* can be traced back to the late sixteenth century, when traders received an official sanction to operate markets after the abolition of market taxes and the dissolution of the guild system.

Shōtengai flourished in the 1950s, and until the turn of the twenty-first century, they were crucial parts of their local neighborhoods. They provided not only daily necessities and services but a center for community activities such as festivals. In recent years, they have fallen into decline as more people have begun frequenting suburban shopping malls.

Sakaemachi Gintengai, built in 1957, stretches roughly 300 meters from Sakuramachi-dōri to Sanbashi-dōri. During Moji's boom years in the Taishō era (1912–1926), this *shōtengai* was the glitzy, fashionable part of town, the epitome of all that was stylish and sophisticated at the time.

Today, visitors are drawn to this old *shōtengai* for both its Shōwa-era (1926–1989) storefronts and the patina of gentle melancholy that suffuses its faded beauty. Fishmongers, beauty salons, a sake specialist, and a rock bar are among the businesses in operation. A decades-old soft-serve ice cream parlor called “Baigetsu” is a local institution.