

Kiyotaki

The leafy district of Kiyotaki sits on a steep hillside with a splendid view of the Kanmon Strait below. Its name, which literally means “pure waterfalls,” refers to the many falls where ocean-bound seafarers would fill their casks with drinking water in preparation for a voyage. During the city’s heyday, around the turn of the twentieth century, it was the location of city hall and the center of a bustling entertainment scene.

Kiyotaki’s narrow, stone-walled lanes once echoed with the rhythmic plucking of shamisen and the clatter of geta (wooden clogs) as geisha hurried to rendezvous with clients at high-class restaurants. Nicknamed the *okuzashiki*, or “private room,” of the city, the pleasure quarter had a rather racy reputation. Moji’s famed restaurant, Sankirō, which once played host to politicians, industrialists, writers, and other wealthy customers of the prewar years, still operates in Kiyotaki, though on a humbler scale.

As Moji’s grandeur faded, the geisha left, the bordellos and many of the restaurants closed their doors, and Kiyotaki became a quiet residential district. Today, small art galleries, boutiques, and cafés can be found there, just ten minutes by foot from Mojikō Station. Tourists come to stroll through the atmospheric lanes and take in the views of the waterway and city. Farther up the hillside is Kiyotaki Park (est. 1916), designed by Honda Seiroku (1866–1952), the country’s first professor of forestry and “father of Japan’s parks.” The verdant slopes and running streams are other aspects of Kiyotaki’s relaxed, timeless charm.