

## **The Port Town of Tsuchizaki**

This port area has been a place of both domestic and international exchange since the 700s. Tsuchizaki and the modern Akita Port trace their history to the port built at the mouth of the Omono River to serve Akita Fort, the northernmost outpost of the Japanese government at the time. The fort fell into disuse in the 900s, but Tsuchizaki and the port continued to expand.

By the 1700s, Tsuchizaki was an important stop on the coastal shipping route between the city of Osaka and the frontiers of Hokkaido. Both northbound and southbound merchant ships stopped at Tsuchizaki stocked with goods from all over Japan. As traditional sailing ships gave way to modern steamships in the early 1900s, local entrepreneurs recognized the urgent need for better infrastructure. The port was modernized and renamed Akita Port in 1941. Today, it is still an important hub for people, goods, and technological exchange.

Despite these shifts in era and technology, the Tsuchizaki Minato Hikiyama Matsuri Festival continues to bring the community together annually. During the festival's impressive finale, teams of local residents pull large wooden floats called *hikiyama* through the streets. The creaking

of the *hikiyama* wheels and the excited shouts of participants resonate through the streets, embodying the lively port-town spirit that continues to thrive in Tsuchizaki.