

## **Saigō Takamori: Folk Hero of Kagoshima**

Saigō Takamori (1828–1877) was one of the most influential samurai in Japanese history. He helped overthrow the Tokugawa shogunate and restore imperial rule, ushering in the Meiji Restoration of 1868. He is beloved across Japan as a symbol of samurai virtue and strength, particularly in his birthplace of Kagoshima, where he is affectionately known as “Segodon.”

Segodon spent a lot of time in Ibusuki, and connections to his life can be found throughout the area. He often stayed at Unagi Onsen, the hot spring village near Lake Unagi. A statue carved from local Yamagawa stone portraying Segodon and one of his many hunting dogs stands in the community. In central Ibusuki, a museum of local art and history called the Satsuma Denshōkan has many items connected to Segodon, including his watch and woodblock prints of his famous battles. Hikers on Mt. Kaimondake, his preferred hunting ground, can walk in the leader’s

proverbial footsteps.

Visitors to Ibusuki are likely to see Segodon's bushy eyebrows and brawny wrestler's physique portrayed in everything from dignified bronzes to cartoonish keychains, evidence of Kagoshima's pride in its hometown hero.