

## **Miike Port**

Before Miike Port was built, coal from Miike Coal Mine was carried via the Miike Coal Railway to the mouth of the Ōmura River, where it was loaded onto barges and transported to two nearby ports. By 1900, Mitsui Group, the operators of the mine, wanted a new port to improve shipping efficiency, handle increased production, and reduce costs. However, the shallow port on the east coast of the Ariake Sea could not accommodate large ships.

Mitsui had to create a modern deepwater harbor. First, in 1902, the company built embankments to dam the tidal flats before dredging a channel. Once the channel was deep enough, the company built long breakwaters on either side to prevent sand from filling it back up. In 1905, construction began on the lock gates (20.12 meters wide and 37.51 meters long) that would keep the dock area's water level above 8.5 meters, even at low tide. Completed in 1908, this is the only lock-gate harbor system in

Japan. The port's shape is likened to a hummingbird. When seen from above, the navigation channel looks like the beak; the harbor, the body and spread wings; and the dock, the tail.

Ships would navigate into the harbor and wait to enter the dock area, where bulk loaders could transfer coal simultaneously into the holds of three 10,000-tonne-class ships. After the port was completed, coal from Ōmura was exported to Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

The navigation channel from the Ariake Sea to the dock area is 1,830 meters long and 137 meters wide. The harbor has an area of approximately 500,000 square meters, and the dock area is 130,000 square meters.

Miike Port is now under the authority of Fukuoka Prefecture, and the main port facilities have been transferred to the north side of the harbor.

Although the lock gates are too narrow for modern ships, they are still opened and closed regularly to keep their hydraulic engines in working

order.

The yellow floating crane near the former customs house was made in Britain and is likely the oldest of its kind in Japan. It is powered by a coal-fired steam boiler, which takes around two hours to warm up. The crane has a lifting power of 15 tonnes and is still used for moving freight today.

In 2015, Miike Port was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.