

Takeho Beach and the Mighty Kitamae Ships



From the mid-1700's until the dawn of the 20th century, much of Japan's economy was closely interwoven with the shipment routes of the mighty Kitamae ships. Sailing from the northern waters of Hokkaido all the way down to the southern region of Kyushu, these sturdy ships and their crew members had a tremendous responsibility to maintain the heartbeat of Japan's trade. While delivering fish, cash crops, and other goods to various ports of call, the Kitamae ships also spread local cultures, arts, and music to other areas throughout the country, leaving waves of rich regional histories and strong community identities in their wake.

Takeho, a beach town just one train stop north of Kinosaki Onsen, was one of the ports for the Kitamae ships. While the vessels' heydays are long gone, their historic legacy and cultural influences can still be seen everywhere throughout the town, from the quaint seafood haunts frequented by locals to the various artistic homages decorating sidewalks and buildings.



“Yakisugi” Cedar

A traveler's journey through Takeho's hearty sea-faring history begins with a relaxed stroll among winding alleyways and cedar-flanked streets. Most buildings dotting the townscape belong to a unique architectural tradition that goes by the name of “yakisugi,” literally translated to “charred cedar” in English. Thick, brown cedar boards are lightly burnt on the surface - a method believed to strengthen and waterproof the wood, and provide a sturdy foundation for protection against the strong, salty sea winds the town's shores are so often acquainted with.



Oyojikan

One building known by all locals as “Oyojikan” is a prime example of yakisugi architecture in action. One swipe of the hand across its weathered cedar exterior can transport a guest back to the 1800s, when the wealthy family of this home was at the height of their prosperity. Known as the Sumiyoshi household, the family boasted two Kitamae ships and had a highly lucrative shipping business attached to their name. While Oyojikan has bid farewell to the Sumiyoshi family and the bustling days of maritime trade, part of the home’s interior has since been renovated into a small museum showcasing antique tools used by Kitamae ship captains and crew. After meandering through Oyojikan’s many nooks and crannies, stop by the cafe area for some tea and a chat with the friendly local staff.



Nekozaki Peninsula



A few minutes after walking past the last of the rustic homes and shops painting Takeno’s landscape will land visitors at the San’in Kaigan UNESCO Global Geopark’s Takeno Beach, one of Japan’s top 100 beaches and also the stunning home of Nekozaki Peninsula. With an aerial view and an imaginative mind, this majestic hilly landmass transforms into a crouching feline

guardian for the town and Kitamae ships, truly living up to its namesake “Nekozaki” or “Cat Cape.” Historically, the peninsula served as a vital shield against the blustery elements for docked ships. Whenever monsoon winds raged from the northwest, the mighty breadth of the peninsula’s eastern side protected ships from the storms. Nowadays, visitors can trek the crouching cat’s back with a guided tour of the peninsula.

Kitamaekan Museum

The Kitamaekan building, as the name implies, is a treasure trove of history starting with a 1 / 5 scale model of a Kita Mae ship. Exhibits written in English explain Takeno’s history as a trading hub and also introduce the unique geological formations dotting Takeno Beach. Indoor and outdoor public baths along with saunas located on the second floor are the perfect mode of relaxation to end the day, providing bathers with unbeatable beachside views.





[Kinosaki Onsen](#) is a town of time-honored hot springs dating back 1300 years ago. It is home to seven public bathhouses, all located within walking distance of each other and the train station. Guests are encouraged to wear yukata and geta, stroll through the town, and

[Toyooka](#) is a downtown area home to the Oriental White Stork, a bird that was revived from extinction in this very town. The city's efforts restored the Oriental White Stork population, and now over 300 fly the skies of Japan. Toyooka is also known for the Genbudo Caves.



[Izushi](#) is the resident castle town, popular for its nostalgic atmosphere of Edo-era Japan. It is home to many interesting attractions such as castle ruins, a samurai house, a kabuki theater, and a clock tower. The town's specialty is Izushi Sara Soba, buckwheat noodles served in small portions on small plates.

[Kannabe](#) is a mountainous area with fun activities year-round. In the winter, one can go skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, and sledding. In the warm months, one can go camping, paragliding, fishing, tree climbing, and more. Kannabe is the perfect destination for adventurers.



[Takeno](#) is a quaint fisherman town that is a hidden gem among the northern coast of Hyogo Prefecture. The beach has clear, blue waters while the mountains surrounding it offer great hiking opportunities. It is encouraged to stroll through the peaceful town, where one can find small shops and traditional landscapes.

[Tanto](#) is a quiet countryside town with magnificent nature—including a giant field of sunflowers in the summer and brilliant red-leaved trees in the fall.

