

Mitarai's Origins

You would be forgiven for thinking the slow life existed here for centuries. In fact, in its heyday, Mitarai was regional hub for trade, entertainment and pleasure.

The town developed with domestic sea trade routes during the Edo Period. This was a time when Japan was in 'sakoku' - isolated from the rest of the world for over two hundred years until 1853.

Japanese shipping hugged the coastline, riding the tides and the winds up and down the length and breadth of Japan. With its natural protected harbor and located on the important sea route to and from Osaka, Mitarai became an ideal place to drop anchor.

The town thrived. They re-stocked ships in the harbor with water and provisions, while the town provided the wealthy captains and seafarers with everything from theaters, shops, sento bath-houses, to even a geisha house. Most of these buildings still survive today.

The women of Mitarai prepare and maintain these bamboo flower arrangements through the year.



Sumiyoshi Shrine Bus Stop



Sumiyoshi Shrine



Ebisu Shrine



a Kyu Shibaya Residence

The famous Edo Period cartographer and surveyor Ino Tadataka stayed in this house on his travels to create the first map of Japan.



b Tokiwa Street

This is the oldest main street in Mitarai, where wholesale stores bought and sold goods carried in by the trade vessels.



c Tenmangu Shrine

This shrine venerates the famous Sugawara no Michizane, who came to Mitarai after losing in battle in 901CE. According to legend, Michizane washed his hands in the well at the back of the shrine, thus giving the town its name "Mitarai", which means "washing hands".



Kanko Well



d Kaneko-Tei Japanese Teahouse

This is the only Edo Period Ueda Soko Ryu Japanese teahouse in existence. This teahouse was the setting for various secret meetings between key figures who would later play a pivotal role in the Meiji Restoration.



e Waka-Ebisuya

From the 18th century, between 50 and 100 geishas lived and worked in this building. The building originally had two floors and you can still walk through to the VIP rooms at the back.



f Shinko Clock Shop

One of the oldest clock shops in Japan is still in business on the main road in Mitarai. They began selling clocks in 1858 and current shop was built in 1919. Its 4th generation master watchmaker Keiichi Matsuura is famous throughout Japan for his skill at repairing antique timepieces.



g Mitarai Showa Museum

This museum exhibits a vast array of toys and artifacts from Japan's Showa Period (1926 - 1989). All the exhibits come from the extensive private collection of Mitarai's chief monk at Daitoji Temple, Kazuaki Sekifuji.



i Mitarai Edo Museum

This museum houses documents relating to the origins and development of Mitarai during the Edo Period from 1666 to 1868.



j Wakiya Residence

This was the local base for the Satsuma clan - one of the main powers in the Meiji Restoration. Sailors working for the Satsuma clan would lodge here during their time in Mitarai.

h Otomezza

A classic theater and cinema built in 1937. In 2002, the building was fully restored to its original state and opened to the public.



k Kusushi

This 100 year-old former hospital has been renovated into a stylish guesthouse and bar. Mitarai used to be a fully self-contained town with hospitals, hair salons, shops, and a dentist.



l Shichikyo-Kan Residence

This beautiful house was frequented by Sanetomi Sanjo - one of the leading characters of the Meiji Restoration. Originally at the tip of Mitarai, the house was famous for its unparalleled sea views.



m Manshuji Temple

The stone wall of Manshuji Temple was constructed during the Warring States Period (1467 - 1603) and predates all the buildings in Mitarai. The exact purpose of the structure is still clouded in mystery. Most of Mitarai is built on land reclaimed from the sea and the original shoreline ran along to the wall of Manshuji.



o Mitarai Lighthouses

The stone lantern on the shore was built in 1832. Originally this stone lantern was positioned at the end of the pier as a lighthouse. The current lighthouse was built after the great typhoon of 1991.



n Seafront Terraces

Originally built by merchants, the middle of the three buildings (currently Wakacho Cafe) was used as seafront lodgings for members of the Ōzu clan, and later for the Uwajima clan (both pre-sent-day Ehime Prefecture).



p Chisago Pier

The stone pier was created by the Hiroshima clan in 1829. With a length of 120 meters, this was the largest of its kind in western Japan.