

# Guide to the Isle of Treasures: SADO

Exploring  
History  
and  
Tradition

*Take along our ultimate guide to the Isle of Culture,  
where everything and everyone came and went by sea.*



# Prologue

## Sado: Cultural Crossroads

Where people, goods and culture come and go.

The largest island in the Sea of Japan, Sado Island covers an area of about 855 square kilometers, and its coastline stretches approximately 280 kilometers. Sado is located 32 kilometers off the coast of the Kakuda Cape in Niigata City, the closest mainland point across the Sado Strait. The island is traversed by the Osado Mountain Range in the north and the Kosado Hills to the south, and between the two ranges is the grain belt of Kuninaka Plain. With its rich variety of landforms, including mountains, the sea, plains, rivers and a lake, Sado is said to be a microcosm of Japan. Blessed not only with good geographical conditions, Sado also has a long cultural history. The Chojagadaira Ruins are Sado's oldest and largest of the Jomon era (circa 10,500–300 BC). The remains of this ancient village are located on a high terrace, 175 meters above sea-level on the tip of the Ogi Peninsula, and stretch 100 meters east-to-west and 150 meters north-to-south. Archaeological finds indicate that people were already living here 25,000 years ago.

A number of people have come to and from the island by sea since ancient times. Sado Kokubunji Temple (a provincial temple) was established in 741, and a roof tile bearing a portrait donated by the Provincial Governor of Noto (in Ishikawa Prefecture) was discovered in its ruins. This discovery illustrates the

movement of goods and people at that time. From the early 8th century, notables were exiled to Sado and came across the sea from the ancient capital of Kyoto, including Hozumi no Asomi Oi (a court noble and poet who criticized the Emperor), Zeami (a Noh playwright who brought Noh theater to a level of perfection), Nichiren Shonin (founder of the Nichiren School of Buddhism), Suketomo Hino (a court noble), and Emperor Juntoku. After gold and silver were discovered in Aikawa in the early 17th century, a town was quickly formed as officials, craftsmen and townspeople gathered from all around Japan in order to supply goods and services to the bustling mining town. In addition, Sado had a kitamaebune (trading ships sailing through the Sea of Japan) port of call, so various goods, as well as cultures, were brought from other parts of Japan.

Sado is said to be a cultural crossroads, and a treasure trove of history and traditions. Culture brought from outside of the island, and its own indigenous traditions, have been fused into the current, unique culture of Sado. This brochure can introduce only a portion of this amazing place, but take it along on your journey. Every time you take a walk, there will be something new to find.





Kaifu Coast

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Death of the Historical Buddha painting owned by Hosenji Temple



Toki in Nehan-zu

## Toki (crested ibis) portrayed in the Death of the Historical Buddha paintings

Nehan-zu (The Death of the Historical Buddha painting) depicts Sakyamuni entering nirvana (nehan in Japanese). Sakyamuni is shown lying down on a bed between sala trees with his head pointing north, and quietly entering nirvana. His followers are gathered around him grieving, and among those drawn are divine animals, including a white elephant, a peacock, a lion, a crane and a fowl. Two temples in Sado house Nehan-zu in which Toki (the famous Japanese crested ibis) is included among these animals. The two temples are Hosenji Temple and Jissoji Temple of the Nichiren School.

Toki feed on small creatures, such as river snails, that inhabit rice paddies. As use of agricultural chemicals and weed killers became widespread in order to streamline farmwork, the number of Toki declined in direct relationship to their food. Wild ibises were initially kept under protection at the Sado Toki Conservation Center to prevent the extinction of native Toki, but to no avail. The last bird died in 2003, and Japanese crested ibises became extinct in Japan. The following year, however, artificial propagation using a pair of ibises on loan from China, where wild crested ibises still thrive, turned out to be successful. Subsequent artificial breeding continued, and the birds were released on a trial basis in 2008. In 2012, chicks were born in the wild for the first time in 38 years, and efforts to protect the birds continue to be made today.

Try taking a walk around the rice paddies in Sado, and if you are lucky, you might encounter Toki getting food or flying with wings widespread. Since their release to the wild in 2008, people all over Sado, especially farmers, have been making concerted efforts to promote agriculture that enhances biodiversity and provides a safe habitat for Toki and other creatures. For example, farmers try to reduce the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, and set up fishways in their rice paddies.

Sado has been working to revive the Toki population and the birds can, once again, be found flying in the island skies. By curious coincidence, Nehan-zu paintings that include an image of Toki have been passed down on this island for generations.

### [Event information] Nirvana Ritual 'Nehan-e' at Hosenji Temple

At Hosenji Temple, a Nehan-zu painting with an image of Toki is presented to the public once every year, coinciding with the Nirvana Ritual marking Buddha's death on March 16.



See all of Sado's cultural properties at  
[http://www.city.sado.niigata.jp/z\\_ot/cultural\\_property/](http://www.city.sado.niigata.jp/z_ot/cultural_property/)



# Open the Doors to Prayer, I

Visit temples and shrines laden with history



## Kokubunji Temple

Founded in 741

### The oldest and largest temple on Sado

Kokubunji Temples are provincial temples which were established all over Japan by order of Emperor Shomu in 741. Each had a seven-story pagoda and ten copies of the Lotus Sutra. A total of 69 Kokubunji Temples are thought to have once existed, and Sado Kokubunji Temple is one of them. The seven-story pagoda burned down in 1301, and the main hall, too, in 1529. The present temple buildings were completed in the Edo Period (1603–1868). The wooden statue of Seated Yakushi Nyorai, reputed to have been created in the Heian Period (794–1185), is installed at Rurido Hall, which was reconstructed in 1666. The original cornerstones, buried underground for centuries, were unearthed in 1926, and those of Kondo Hall, the cloisters, the auditorium (the new hall), the Great South Gate and the pagoda were discovered during subsequent excavations. Designated a National Historic Site in 1929, The original Kokubunji Temple remains are now a historical park, evoking a sense of the early 8th century.

[Map] C-6

[Address] 113 Kokubunji, Sado

Wooden statue of Seated Yakushi Nyorai  
(National Important Cultural Property)  
Period: Heian (794–1185) Height: 1.36 m



Thatched roof residence and reception hall



Passing through the Chumon (middle) Gate, you will find a well-kept garden.



Sado Kokubunji was built with corridors, a rare style.  
(National Historic Site)



The main hall, Rurido Hall  
(Tangible Cultural Property of Sado City)



## A solemn ambiance since ancient times

People living on Sado have lovingly preserved places of prayer and worship for generations, making them the backbone of people's lives. It was tough for us to narrow down the treasures for this brochure, but here are our picks. Why not visit these places of prayer quietly resting, undisturbed, all around Sado?

### Abutsubo Myosenji Temple

Founded in 1279

**The only five-story pagoda still in existence in Niigata Prefecture**

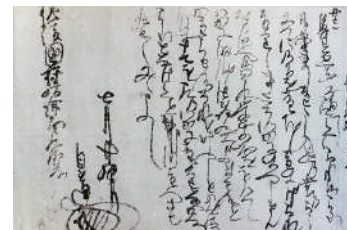
Myosenji Temple was established by the monk, Abutsubo Nittoku Shonin, who used to be a samurai warrior serving the palace guard in the ancient capital city of Kyoto. He accompanied Emperor Juntoku to Sado when the Emperor was exiled, and after the Emperor passed away, he served the monk, Nichiren (founder of the Nichiren School of Buddhism who was exiled to Sado) and became a follower along with his wife. Thus, letters written by Nichiren have been kept as temple treasures, and copies are displayed here. A five-story pagoda, a National Important Cultural Property, stands within the precinct, and is said to have been designed to imitate the one at Nikko Toshogu Shrine in Tochigi Prefecture. This pagoda was constructed by two successive generations of master carpenters from the Aikawa area and completed in 1825. Its Japanese-style pagoda stands on a square base, each side of which is about 6 meters, and has a pyramid-shaped tile roof with an Edo (now Tokyo)-style metal ornament at the apex. The building was constructed mainly of pine, using cedar for the pillars, and the overhanging roof is supported by complex zelkova bracket systems.

[Map] C-6

[Address] 29 Abutsubo, Sado



Five-story pagoda (National Important Cultural Property)  
Period: Edo (1603–1868) Dimensions: overall height, 24 m; side length, 3.6 m



Handwritten letter by Nichiren Shonin  
(National Important Cultural Property)  
Period: Kamakura (1185–1333)  
Words of gratitude for Sado islanders' kindness and teachings of the Lotus Sutra are written on one long sheet of paper.

### Chokokuji Temple

Founded in 807

**Buddha statues and handwritten documents are displayed in the exhibition rooms.**

Chokokuji Temple is thought to have been founded in 807. Although some claim that this temple was named after Hasedera Temple (written in the same Chinese characters as Chokokuji but pronounced differently in Japanese) in Nara Prefecture, the origin of the name is not clear. Later, however, Zeami (who perfected Noh theatre and was exiled to Sado), mentioned in his book that the site was reminiscent of his hometown, Nara. Chokokuji Temple is home to a number of cultural properties and houses six exhibition rooms (open to the public) where temple treasures are on display. There are many statues of Buddha, such as the wooden statue of Kongara-doji (Prefectural Tangible Cultural Property) and the wooden statue of the Seated Goddess of Hakusan (Tangible Cultural Property of Sado City). The Eleven-headed Kannon (Prefectural Important Cultural Property), built in the same style as the wooden Eleven-headed Kannon (a National Important Cultural Property presented to the public once every 33 years), is also on display in one of the exhibition rooms. Many temple buildings such as the main hall, residence, storehouses for sutras and rice, and the bell house have remained intact since the Edo Period (1603–1868). This temple is also known as a flower temple, so please enjoy the seasonal charms of cherry blossoms in spring, peony and hydrangea in summer, and red and yellow leaves in autumn.

[Map] C-6

[Address] 13 Hase, Sado

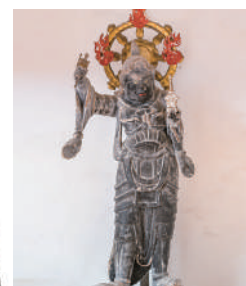


Eleven-headed Kannon  
(Prefectural Tangible Cultural Property)  
Period: late 12th century  
Height: approx. 100 cm



Kongara-doji  
(Prefectural Tangible Cultural Property)  
Period: late 12th century  
Height: 60.3 cm

Seated Goddess of Hakusan  
(Tangible Cultural Property of Sado City)  
Period: circa 8th century  
Dimensions: 54 cm high, 43 cm wide



Wooden Four Guardian Kings  
(Tamonten, the Guardian King of the North / Prefectural Tangible Cultural Property)  
Period: late 12th century



Seated Fudo Myoo  
(Prefectural Tangible Cultural Property)  
Period: late 12th century





Taitokuin Mausoleum (Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property), Period: 18th century  
Shingle roof supported by two pillars features decorations of fine craftsmanship



Octagonal Hall  
(Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property)  
Period: 18th century  
Eaves decorated with carvings and sculptures, including a cloud dragon



Reception Hall  
(Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property)  
reconstructed in 1897.  
Dimensions: 24.6 meters wide; 16.1 meters long

## Rengebuji Temple

Founded in 806

### A treasure trove of historic buildings

Sado is considered to be located in an unlucky direction from the ancient capital city of Kyoto, so to combat bad fortune Rengebuji Temple was founded and named Mt. Kobie (literally: small Hiei) after Mt. Hiei, which stands to the northeast of Kyoto. This ancient temple is said to have been established by the monk Kobo Daishi Kukai (founder of the Shingon esoteric sect of Buddhism), and is also believed to have been constructed by the order of Emperor Saga. Rengebuji Temple is one of the three great, sacred sites of the Shingon school, along with Kongoji Temple in Osaka and Murouji Temple in Nara. The Kobodo hall, Kondo hall, and an ossuary are designated National Important Cultural Properties, and the other sixteen buildings within the compound are registered as National Tangible Cultural Properties. The wooden guardian statues (Prefectural Tangible Cultural Properties) installed at both sides of the Niomon gate were sculpted using zelkoba. They are thought to have been built when the temple was on the rise, because the calm expression in the slightly formalised style indicates a trend from the Kamakura Period (1185–1333). The temple boasts extensive grounds of approximately one hectare. It is famous for hydrangeas blooming all over the temple in July, and thus is sometimes called the Hydrangea Temple.

[Map] B-8

[Address] 182 Kobie, Sado

## Kobie Shrine

Founded in 807

### Rengebuji Temple's tutelary shrine

Originally the tutelary shrine of Rengebuji Temple, it was renamed Kobie Shrine at the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, after Shinto and Buddhism were separated to push Shinto as a national religion. Until then, Shinto and Buddhism were mixed and many Shinto shrines and their deities were combined with Buddhist temples and Buddhas. The main hall (National Important Cultural Property) was built in 1640 in the common 'Nagare-zukuri' style of shrine architecture, which features an asymmetrical gable shingled roof projecting outwards on the sides and supported by four pillars. The stone torii gate standing in front was built in 1608 and bears an inscription of that year. An Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Sado City, the Rice-field Fun Ritual, called "Ta-asobi Shinji," is held on February 6 every year at the thatched roof worship hall (Prefectural Tangible Cultural Property).

[Map] B-8 [Address] 182 Kobie, Sado



Come see the Rice-field Fun Ritual held in the worship hall made to symbolize rice fields.



## Dairenji Temple

Founded in 1421

### Maybe you will find your own face among the Five Hundred Rakan ("Perfected Persons").

Dairenji is a temple of the Soto Zen School of Buddhism established in the Hamochi Ohashi area by a Zen monk from mainland Niigata (Echigo). The Sanmon Gate (Prefectural Tangible Cultural Property) used to be the East Gate of Hamochi Castle (Prefectural Historic Site), which fell after an attack by Kagekatsu Uesugi, the Lord of Echigo. It is believed that the gate was relocated to where it stands now after surviving the fall. The Five Hundred Rakan (enlightened disciples of Buddha) statues are exquisite works by a sculptor from Edo (now Tokyo). Decorations, including gold leaf, are considered to have been done by a lacquer craftsman from Noto, which is a major lacquerware production area in Ishikawa Prefecture.

[Map] B-8 [Address] 2075-Ko, Hamochi Hongo, Sado



Five Hundred Rakan statues created over seven years starting in 1664



Wooden Seated Amida Nyorai (Tangible Cultural Property of Sado City)  
Period: Muromachi (1392–1573) Height: 50 cm (102 cm including the pedestal)  
A principal object of worship with an inscription of the year it was repaired, 1427



## Shoboji Temple

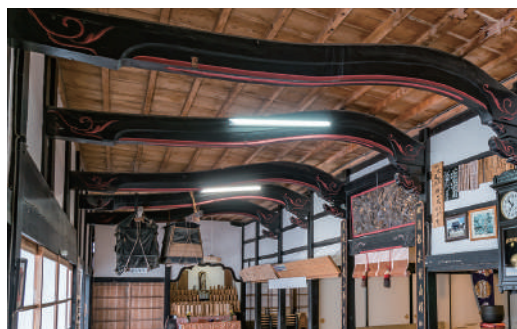
Founded in 1324

### Passing down a mask left by Zeami

Shoboji Temple is where Zeami, a Noh playwright who perfected the artform of Noh, stayed when he was exiled to Sado after incurring the wrath of the shogun in 1434. This temple treasures the ritual mask “Beshimi,” which Zeami reputedly brought from the ancient capital city of Kyoto. Five temple buildings, including Kannon-do Hall, are National-ly Registered Tangible Cultural Properties. The ceiling over the corridor leading to the main hall is supported by elegantly curved beams, and striking carved-wood transom panels are arranged within the hall.

[MAP] C-5

[Address] 504 Izumi Ko, Sado



Graceful curved beams



The “Beshimi” ritual mask (Prefectural Tangible Cultural Property) is also called a rainmaking mask.  
Height: 22.0 cm Width: 15.9 cm



Carved-wood transom panels with spectacular architecture



Bronze Bell (National Important Cultural Property)  
Period: 13th century (Goryeo Period in Korea)  
Height: approx. 83 cm  
Diameter: 61.2 cm

Seated Amida Nyorai (National Important Cultural Property)  
Period: early 12th century  
Height: approx. 87 cm



Seated Yakushi Nyorai (Tangible Cultural Property of Sado City)  
Period: early 12th century  
Height: 52.3 cm

## Choanji Temple

Founded in 831

An ancient temple where the Amida statue of the Heian Period (8th–12th centuries) is handed down.

The dynamic Nio (temple guardians) are thought to have been sculpted by the Kei School (a leader in Buddhist sculpture) and stand at either side of the thatched Niomon Gate. The sculptures and gate are designated Tangible Cultural Properties of Sado City. The principal object of worship is the Seated Amida Nyorai, which was carved and assembled in sections using cypress wood in the early 12th century. This temple houses other ancient statues of Buddha, too, including a Seated Yakushi Nyorai created in the early 12th century, as well as a bronze Korean bell.

[Map] D-5 [Address] 152 Kujikawachi, Sado



Breathtaking view of the platform through the Chumon gate



Elaborate narrative sculptures of the worship hall's exterior

## Seisuiji Temple

Founded in 808

### 400-year-old cedar trees and overhang architecture

A stone-paved path lined with sky-high cedar trees leads up to the Chumon (middle) gate, and after passing through it, the main hall with a platform (Tangible Cultural Property of Sado City) comes into view. Seisuiji Temple belongs to the group headed by Hasedera Temple in Nara, and the platform structure is said to be similar to the temple there. The temple houses a wooden tablet with an inscription of the year 1730, on which can be found information about and a history of the structure, as well as an illustration that portrays the temple buildings in the Edo Period (17th–19th centuries).

[Map] D-5 [Address] 124-1 Niibo Ono, Sado

## Ushio Shrine

Founded in 792

### Sculptures of the worship hall show skillful craftsmanship.

Ushio Shrine was established in 792 by dividing gods from Izumo Taisha Shrine in Shimane Prefecture and re-enshrining them here. The worship hall features a gable roof undulating in three directions, and the sculptures were completed by master craftsmen from both inside and outside of the island. The motifs of the sculptures include animals and auspicious creatures, such as dragons, tigers and lions, as well as a scene depicting Emperor Juntoku's move to Sado. This shrine houses a Noh stage (Prefectural Tangible Folk Cultural Property), too, which was reconstructed during a period of six years starting in 1901, after being burned down in 1899. On this authentic Noh stage, bonfire Noh performances are held in June.

[Map] D-5 [Address] 2529 Niibo Katagami, Sado



# Open the Doors to Prayer, II

Days of festivities full of songs, dances and performances



It is believed that the god of the field descends into the centre of the spiral.



Gosho Shrine Rice Planting Ritual in Shimokawano (Prefectural Intangible Folk Cultural Property), held annually on February 6



Hakusan Shrine Rice-field Fun Ritual in Okubo (Prefectural Intangible Folk Cultural Property), held annually on January 3

## “Kurumadaue” (spiral rice planting) in Kitaushima

(National Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property)

### The Song of Rice, an island treasure

Accompanied by a rice-planting song sung from the ridge of the paddy, three female rice planters clad in classic attire plant seedlings in an outward spiral starting in the middle of the paddy. Symbolizing the sun and acting as a guide for the god of the field's descension, planting in a spiral is thought to be a form of prayer for bumper crops. The rice grown in this field is harvested, dried and threshed separately from other fields, and this practice preserves the old rice-planting traditions. Similar traditions used to be upheld in Iwate, Gifu, Kochi and other prefectures, but most of them have disappeared and now there are only two places left in Japan: Sado and Takayama in Gifu Prefecture. This very rare and valuable rice planting custom is handed down on Sado by the Kitamura family in Kitaushima, and it is the only one that can be witnessed on the island. Spiral rice planting takes place in the middle of or at the end of May every year, in the largest rice paddy (called Oda) of the Kitamura family.

**[Event information]** There are many other agricultural rituals on Sado, including The Rice-field Fun Ritual, called “Ta-asobi Shinji,” held at Hakusan Shrine, and Otaue Rice Planting Ritual at Gosho Shrine. For details, please see page 14.

**[Location]** Kitaushima, Sado

**[Map]** D-1

## Sado Daizen Shrine Noh Stage

### The Oldest Noh Stage in Sado

It is believed that there were once over 200 Noh stages on Sado. There are now just 35, but this number still equals one third of the total remaining Noh stages nationwide. Such a large number of stages reflects how familiar Sado's people were with Noh plays. Zeami, a playwright who brought Noh to perfection, was exiled to Sado in the 15th century, but it was not until the 17th century that Noh gained recognition among the general population. This happened because Nagayasu Okubo, whose father was a performer of Sarugaku (popular entertainment involving acrobatics and mime), became the Commissioner of Sado and brought Noh performers here. After that, Noh plays were promoted, backed by the wealth produced from the gold and silver mine, and took root in people's lives. These days, some locals still hold Noh performances in early summer.

**[Event information]** Yearly Bonfire Noh performances are held in early summer at Noh stages around Sado. For details, please see page 14.

**[Location]** 561 Takeda **[Map]** C-6



Daizen Shrine Noh Stage (Prefectural Tangible Folk Cultural Property) reconstructed in 1846



Most of the festivals are held in spring and autumn, when people offer prayers for good crops and show gratitude for rich harvests to deities and ancestors. Sado has numerous small communities, and the festivals are as varied as the villages. Join in the festivities like a local when residents gather to sing and dance.

## Sanno Festival in Niibo

(Prefectural Intangible Folk Cultural Property)

### A vibrant festival with a history of 800 years

Celebrated by six surrounding communities in Niibo, Sanno Festival is an annual festival of Niibo Hiyoshi Shrine, where portable shrines from all seven Sanno shrines gather. Niibo Hiyoshi Shrine is believed to be a shrine where deities of Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine (the head of Sanno shrine in Otsu, Shiga Prefecture), were divided and re-enshrined. Each of the two shrines consists of seven smaller shrines of Sanno and have similar rituals, and that suggests a strong tie between them. During the festival, a Buddhist monk recites sutras in the main hall. This clearly reflects the fusion of Shinto (an ancient tradition of nature worship) and Buddhism, where the temple attached to a shrine was actively involved in its management until shrines and temples were officially separated in the late 19th century. This festival is “old-style” in every aspect, from the gathering of portable shrines from surrounding communities to the Ondeko (masked deity dance) and lion dance groups visiting door to door, and the archery on horseback. It is not clear when this festival began, but according to the history book, *Sadoshi*, horseback archery and portable shrine parades were already being carried out in the late 16th century.

**[Location]** Kaminiibo, Sado **[Map]** D-5



Vibrant Ondeko (masked deity dance) performance in front of Niibo Hiyoshi Shrine



Sculpted deity masks  
(Property of Niibo Museum of History and Folklore)



Ondeko and lion dance troupes go from house to house.

## Kuji Hachimangu Shrine Festival

(Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Sado City)

### A traditional event reminiscent of a medieval painting

The earliest record of this valuable, traditional event of Kuji Hachimangu Shrine can be found in a document compiled in 1405. The festival begins with attendants and archers staying overnight at the shrine on September 13, followed by a pre-festival event on the evening of the 14th. The main festival, on September 15, includes rituals held at the big hall, seawater scooping, a portable shrine parade and archery on horseback. Three neighbouring communities dedicate performances such as To-To (sword dance), Ondeko (masked deity dance) and Hanagasa Odori (flower hat dance, a Prefectural Intangible Folk Cultural Property).

**[Event information]** The main festival today is held on the closest Sunday to September 15. For details, please see page 14.

**[Map]** D-4



Hanagasa Odori is performed to please and comfort deities, and pray for rich harvests

## Puppet Theaters

(National Important Intangible Folk Cultural Properties)

### Popular entertainment enjoyed by islanders: Bunya, Sekkyo, Noroma puppet theaters

Puppetry on Sado has developed uniquely from its earliest form. One puppeteer manipulates one puppet, unlike Bunraku where each puppet requires three puppeteers to operate it. Bunya puppet drama is performed in the style derived from the dramatic Bunyabushi narration of Kyoto, accompanied by a shamisen (three-string lute) player who is also a narrator. Sekkyo puppet plays, the oldest form of puppetry, are accompanied by Sekkyobushi chanting, which is associated with the teachings of Buddhism. Noroma is a comic puppet drama performed in Sado dialect.

**[Event information]** For details, please see page 14.



Expressive puppet heads exhibited in the Niibo Museum of History and Folklore



Life like puppets move on the stage

## Utou Shrine Festival

(Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Sado City)

### Stately and gorgeous portable shrine procession

The portable shrine procession, parading through the streets and accompanied by calls of encouragement like, “Chosaya!” makes an impressive scene, along with thousands of paper lanterns and the echoes of a conch-shell trumpet. The taiko drumming of the Ondaiko (literally: drum) in this area does not feature a masked deity. Instead, a performer wearing a mask of an elderly man dances to the rhythm of the drum, holding a square, wooden measuring cup and a persimmon. This performance is said to have originated from mimes imitating the miners digging for ore at the gold and silver mine.

**[Location]** Aikawa, Sado

**[Date]** Held annually on October 19

**[Map]** A-5



The portable shrine parade sets off from Utou Shrine.



The portable shrine parades through the streets until late at night.

## Kojishimai (Deer Dance)

(Intangible Folk Cultural Property of Sado City)

### Similar to the deer dance found in the Tohoku region

A trio of deer (a stag, a doe and a fawn) performs two styles of dance to two different songs: one is dedicated to the shrine, and the other is performed in town. This tradition in Ogimachi (Inari-cho) is believed to have been brought from Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine in Kyoto at the time of the founding of an Inari shrine. Kojishimai can be seen in the Akadomari, Ryotsu and Aikawa areas, too.

**[Date]** Event dates vary depending on the area. For details, please see page 14.

**[Location]** Ogimachi, Sado



Enjoy the different styles of the dance.



In Akadama, deer dance to the bamboo flute as they move in an arc.

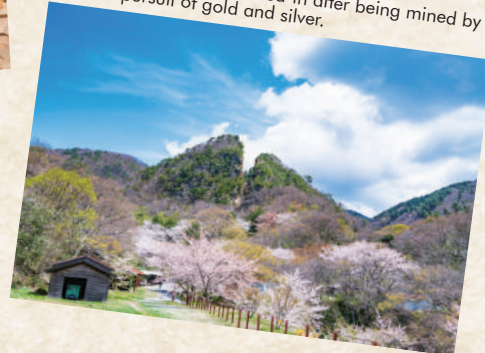


# Walking Map I: Aikawa



Scale model of Aikawa with closely lined-up houses  
(Property of Gold Mine Museum)

Doyu no Warito (National Historic Site):  
This split mountaintop caved-in after being mined by  
hand in pursuit of gold and silver.



## 1 Kitazawa Flotation Plant Ruins

(National Historic Site)

Kitazawa Flotation Plant is an ore processing facility constructed in 1940 to extract gold in order to boost production. This facility made it possible to process 50,000 tons of ore monthly. Now in ruins, Kitazawa Flotation Plant is a perfect place to take some artistic snapshots.

## Explore the vestiges of a mining town from the 17th century to the present.

Aikawa flourished as a mining town in the Edo Period (17th–19th centuries). Centered around the street leading up to the gold and silver mine, to the east of the Sado Commissioner's Office, the town was developed so that people with the same occupation were clustered in a specific quarter, and it thrived until mining was brought to an end in 1989. Daiku-cho was where miners lived; Shingoro-cho was named after a mining engineer; Komeya (literally: rice shop)-cho was where you could buy rice; Misoya-cho was where you could buy bean paste (miso), Aimonio-cho was the salted fish (aimono) shop quarter, etc. So, when strolling around, be on the lookout for remnants of this goldrush town.

## The story: Sado Gold and Silver Mine

*The Collection of Tales of Times Now Past*, thought to have been compiled at the end of the 12th century, features an episode about an iron sand collector coming over to Sado from Noto and collecting alluvial gold. The story is believed to be set in Nishimikawa, in the Mano area of Sado. There, slightly shiny gold was collected by placing gravel and sand in sieves on a river and washing away the lighter sand.

Later, mines such as Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine in Shimane Prefecture were actively developed throughout Japan, and the method of collecting gold and silver from hard rocks was gradually established. On Sado, Tsurushi Ginzan Silver Mine was discovered in the Sawata area by merchants from Echigo (now mainland Niigata), and silver was mined. In Aikawa, located in close proximity to Tsurushi Silver Mine, gold-silver veins around Doyu no Warito were discovered in 1601, and large-scale development of the mine began.

The Tokugawa shogunate took an interest in the

mine and placed Sado under its direct control. The shogunate then appointed Nagayasu Okubo, who had been Commissioner for Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine, as Deputy of Sado (and later Commissioner) in 1603. Nagayasu established the shogunate outpost (later the Commissioner's Office) on the tip of the terrace facing the sea in Aikawa, and planned a town where people with the same occupation could reside in clusters, such as a rice shop quarter, a miso shop quarter and a miners quarter. Seeking wealth, mining experts, miners, merchants and craftsmen came to Aikawa from all over Japan. The discovery of gold and silver transformed overnight a small, poor village with just a few households into a huge mining town with a population of forty- to fifty-thousand, changing Aikawa completely.

For a period of time, the gold and silver from Sado were used to mint small coins called koban, which contributed to the shogunate's finances. However, after all of the profitable veins were extracted, tunnels had to be dug down deeper and deeper, even below sea level, in search of new seams. As the expense of preventing tunnels from flooding mounted and the production of gold and silver decreased, the mine in Aikawa suffered.

This period of decline, however, came to a halt when mining activities began to be modernized in 1869. The latest technologies and machines brought from Europe (following the opening of Japan's gates to the world) boosted production, and the government-run Sado Mine became one of the leading mines in Japan. It was later managed under the Bureau of Imperial Estates of the Imperial Household Department (now the Imperial Household Agency) as an Imperial asset, and then sold in the private sector (Mitsubishi Company) in 1896.

In 1937, following privatization, the government promoted an increase in production of gold and silver for overseas trade. Thus, Kitazawa Flotation Plant, Odate Mine Shaft, Takato Crushing Plant and miners residences were established in quick succession, and annual gold production reached approximately 1.5 tons. However, the amount gradually decreased, and after a series of scaling down production activities, the mine was finally closed in 1989.

The 400-year, culminated history of the mine remains intact in remnants, as well as in people's lives, to this day.



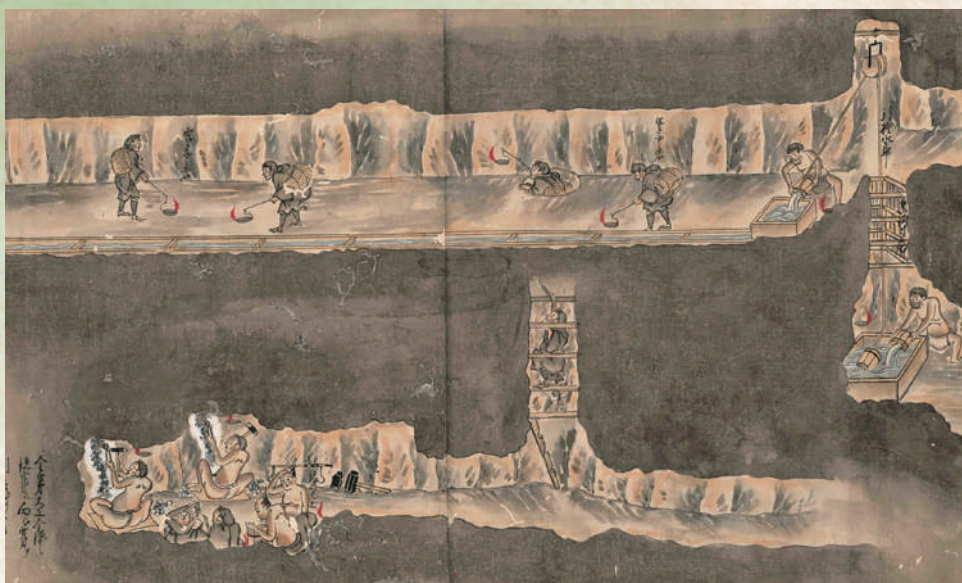


You can walk through real tunnels underground at Golden Sado.

## Sado gold and silver mine illustrated on a scroll

(Tangible Cultural Property of Sado City)

This illustrated scroll portrays the process and procedures of mining, and its purpose was to explain the complicated workings of the mine to the Commissioner and other officials. This one was painted in the later half of the Edo Period (1688–1736), and many similar scrolls and illustrations depicting the gold and silver mine still remain. Dug by hand in all directions, the maze of tunnels spreads like an ants' nest.



Bottom left: miners busy digging in a tunnel; top: workers going back and forth carrying mined ore

## Take a stroll through history!



(National Historic Site)

### ② Sado Commissioner's Office

The Sado Commissioner's Office housed the government officials in charge of the administration of the country of Sado, and management of the gold and silver mine. It also contained a plant for processing and concentrating gold and silver, as well as the Commissioner's residence. Today, the buildings have been restored and are open to the public.



(National Historic Site)

### ③ Time Bell Tower

The time bell tower announced the time for a period of 200 years, from the early 18th century until the late 19th century. The bell was cast in bronze produced in Sado. Its tower stands at the end of the brick wall of the former court building, on a street which boasts stunning views.



(Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property)

### ④ Old Aikawa Detention Branch

Established in 1954 as a branch of Niigata Prison, Aikawa Detention Branch was an institution where suspects and defendants were held. It was in use until 1972. The atmospheric modern architecture has been drawing attention, and is open to the public.



(Nationally Registered Tangible Cultural Property)

### ⑤ Old Aikawa Tax Office

The Aikawa Tax Office was established in 1889. The main building remaining to this day was constructed in 1931, and served as a tax office until 1970. With its Western-style architecture featuring symmetric design, it has become a recognized landmark in the Aikawa town center, along with the Old Aikawa Detention Branch.



P Parking Lot

Bus Stop

Post Office

Toilets

Approx. 100 m







**Sengokubune "Hakusanmaru"**  
Sengokubune is a large wooden trading ship with a cargo-carrying capacity of 1000 koku (150 tons, "sengoku" in Japanese).  
Length: 23.75 m  
Stern height: 6.61 m  
Tonnage: 77 tons (512 koku)



### ① Sadokoku Ogi Folk Museum

Sadokoku Ogi Folk Museum is housed in the wooden building of the former Shukunegi Elementary School, constructed in 1921. This museum exhibits a collection of folk materials assembled from all parts of Sado, but centered around the Minami (southern) Sado area. In the adjoining exhibition hall, a large wooden trading ship, "Hakusanmaru," is on display.

## Walking Map II : Shukunegi

**Discover life and culture by the sea  
at the heart of the tradeship industry.**

Nestled in a narrow valley facing a cove situated at the southwest tip of Sado, Shukunegi flourished as a base for the wholesale shipping industry using sengokubune (large wooden trading ships) from the Edo Period into the Meiji Period (17th–19th centuries). In the past, wholesale shipping agents, captains, ship builders, sailors, blacksmiths, tub merchants and masons flocked to reside in Shukunegi and a small city was formed. If you pay attention to the ambiance of the village, which survives to this day, you will see traces of the wit and ingenuity developed by villagers who lived shoulder to shoulder in Shukunegi.



### The story: a Shipping Village

In the Edo Period (1603–1868), large wooden ships sailed from Kyoto and Osaka through the Sea of Japan to transport and trade cargo via many ports, and those ships were called "kitamaebune." There were two ship routes and they were managed by the shogunate. The westbound route went from Sakata, Yamagata Prefecture, to Osaka, through the Seto Inland Sea between Honshu and Shikoku, and then eastward to Edo. The eastbound route went from Sakata through the strait between Honshu and Hokkaido, and then southward to Edo. As land transportation such as railways and telecommunication systems developed, the demand for kitamaebune gradually declined and the ships eventually disappeared.

Sado's kitamaebune industry is thought to have been at its pinnacle for a period of about 100 years, between 1750 and 1850. After Ogi Port was added to the ports of call on the westbound route in 1672 by the shogunate, Shukunegi, located within easy reach of Ogi Port, became a base for the wholesale

shipping industry, and Japanese-style ships were built at the inlet right in front of the village. Approximately 500 people, including ship owners, captains, sailors, shipbuilders, blacksmiths, tub merchants and stone masons, gathered there. The ships brought various goods traded at ports en route of the voyage, including opulent lacquerware with gold decorations used by ship owners for feasts, high-quality lacquered bowls produced in Wajima (a well-known production area), and white Imari ware with indigo patterns, all of which were expensive and out of reach for common people at that time. Shukunegi still has granite stone and roof tiles delivered from the Setouchi and San-in areas in western Japan, respectively. Ships brought a variety of cultures as well as goods, and within Sado, a unique way of life developed.

When the use of Japanese-style wooden ships went into decline in the late 19th century, people in Shukunegi began to turn their heads away from the sea, seeking out land for farming, and the kitamaebune gradually disappeared. During the time of high economic growth in the last half of the 20th century, lifestyles drastically changed, and old everyday items and tools were abandoned one after another.

Shukunegi came back into the spotlight as a village representing the wholesale shipping industry in 1980, when surveys of houses were conducted and items were collected for the folk museum. The buildings in Shukunegi have distinctive features built under the influence of the wholesale shipping industry, and so the town was designated a National Important Preservation District for a Group of Traditional Buildings in 1991. In 1998, a full-scale kitamaebune was restored based on drawings from 1858 that had been collected from Shukunegi and kept at the folk museum.

Today, a stroll through Shukunegi provides a hint of the days when the village prospered from the wholesale shipping industry. While the houses in Shukunegi used to have shingled roofs with stones on top and simple exteriors made of vertically grained cedar timber, by contrast the interior columns, sliding doors and walls were lavishly decorated with vermilion lacquer. Some houses within the village are open to the public and a tour led by a local guide is available upon request. Please take your time and explore this town with a nostalgic ambiance.



## Shukunegi Architecture Guide

### Discover historic buildings

#### A. Seikuro, a private house open to the public

Seikuro used to be the main house of a shipping agent, who owned two ships. Constructed in 1858, it has a luxurious design, including a spacious entry area and kitchen with packed-earth flooring, chamfered pillars, and an interior decorated with lacquer. This architecture represents the highest quality of materials and craftsmanship at the time.

#### B. Kanekoya

Built before 1846, this house was purchased in 1935 by the Kanekoya family, who were sailors, and used as their main residence. The interior is fully restored in the style of the old times. The bedroom has a raised floor in the traditional raised-threshold style.

#### C. Isaburo, an inn designed for one guest or group of guests at a time

Built around 1891, Isaburo was the main house building of a sengokubune captain. The residence features unique designs, including a protruding second floor on the north side and an eave decoration bearing the Chinese character for stone: 石.

#### D. Yamashita

Yamashita is one of few buildings in this style, with a wing projecting at a right angle from the main house. The Yamashita family used to be shipping agents and used the wing as a shed to store household goods. At present, the former site of the main house has been reformed into a garden, and the shed has been converted into a café.



The fully-restored interior is open to the public.



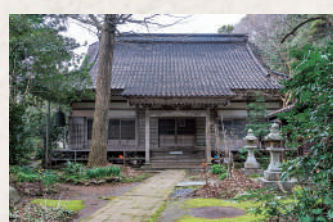
#### 2 Triangle House (Sankakuya)

After a flood in 1846, Sankakuya was transferred to where it stands now. Before relocation, Sankakuya was a 7.2 m x 10.8 m rectangular shape, but it was reconstructed to fit in this narrow corner lot.



#### 3 Yosute Koji

Yosute Koji (reclusive path) is a narrow cobbled path where funeral processions once passed. It is said to have been funded and planned by households along the way. Repeatedly trodden over a long period of time, the central part has been worn away.



#### 4 Shokoji Temple

Reputed to have been established in 1349, Shokoji Temple is an ancient temple of the Jishu School of Buddhism. The main hall was reconstructed in 1923 after a great fire. On the Sanmon main gate, which survived the fire, there remains a wooden plaque bearing an inscription of the year 1713, and other historical information.



#### 5 Roofs with Stones on Top

Many houses in Shukunegi had roofs with stones on top until around 1955. They were covered with long, thin Japanese cedar timber topped with stones as weights. Roofs were reshingled once every several years as a cooperative activity of the village.





# Cultural Properties Explorer Map

## Getting around Sado

Sado Island is probably larger than you think. Covering an area of approximately 855 square kilometres, it is 1.4 times the size of Tokyo's twenty-three wards. There is no railway system on Sado, so the main modes of transportation are buses, cars and taxis. Other options include sightseeing taxis with a driver doubling as a tour guide, rental cars or rental bikes. You can combine different ways to get around depending on your plan and the distance you intend to travel.

## Getting to Sado

It takes 2.5 hours by ship (car ferry) or one hour by jetfoil from Niigata Port to Sado, the largest island in the Sea of Japan. From Tokyo to Niigata, it takes 1.5 hours by air, about 2 hours by rail (Shinkansen bullet trains), or 5 hours by car. Please select the best travel option for your plan.

**Sado Island**



True Sado

## True Sado



For more detailed information on travel options and useful contact information, please visit True Sado, the official tourism website for Sado.

URL: <https://www.visitsado.com/en/tosado/insado>

Find out more about ferry and bus services on the websites of Sado Kisen and Niigata Kotsu.

Sado Kisen URL: <http://www.sadokisen.co.jp/language/en>

Niigata Kotsu URL: <http://www.niigata-kotsu.co.jp>



## Enjoy local festivals and performing arts events

Festivals usually take place on a fixed date, but some are held on holidays so locals can take part without difficulty. Times also vary depending on the community. Please confirm the exact date in advance. For your reference, here are approximate dates of a few main events.

Name of event	Location	Scheduled date
The Rice-field Fun Ritual at Hakusan Shrine	Okubo	January 3
Rice Planting Ritual at Gosho Shrine	Shimokawamo	February 6
The Rice-field Fun Ritual at Kobie Shrine	Kobie	February 6
Ohata Shrine Festival	Okura	April 11
Niibo Sanno Festival	Kaminiibo	April 12–14
Sado Sagiryu Kyogen	Yoshioka	April 14
"Kurumadaue" (spiral rice planting)	Kitaushima	middle to end of May
Akadama Shrine Ritual	Akadama	fourth Sunday in May
Kitano Shrine Festival	Inakujira	August 25
"Kojishimai" (deer dance)	Ogimachi	August 28–30
Kuji Hachimangu Shrine Festival	Shimokuji	closest Sunday to September 15
Utou Shrine Festival	Aikawa Oritomura	October 19
Puppet Theaters and Puppet Heads	For details, please contact Niibo Museum of History and Folklore.	



## Noh Theater

Many Noh performances, including bonfire Noh, are held on stages throughout Sado from April until December. Double your pleasure by coordinating performances with a tour of stages.

Name of event	Location	Scheduled date
Nikuu Shrine Bonfire Noh Performance	232-2 Nikuu	February and August
Daizen Shrine Annual Festival Noh Performance	561 Takeda	April
Tenryo Sado Ryotsu Bonfire Noh Performance	724 Harakuro	May–July, September and October
Daizen Shrine Bonfire Noh and Sagiryu Kyogen	561 Takeda	June
Kusakari Shrine Bonfire Noh and Sagiryu Kyogen	1698 Hamochi Hongo	June
Ushio Shrine Annual Festival Noh Performance	2529 Niibo Katagami	June
Honma Family Regular Noh Performance	987 Agata	July



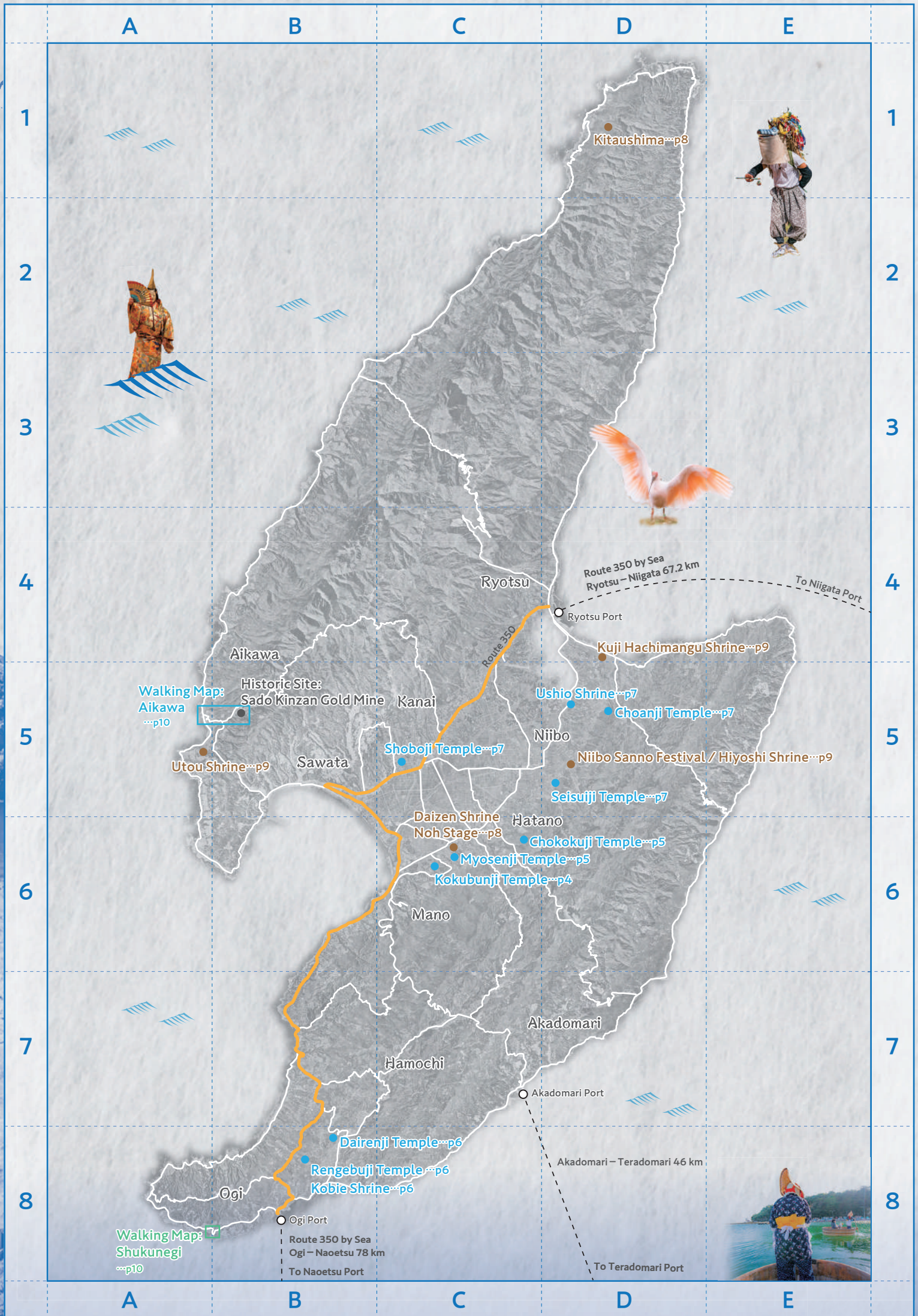






Illustration of Sado (Prefectural Tangible Cultural Property)

Period: 1681-1684 Dimensions: 95 cm high, 96 cm wide

This is a map drawn in the late 17th century depicting the transport network, as well as the landforms and climate of the island.



## Cultural Properties in Sado

For more information on Sado's cultural properties, please visit Sado City's website,  
'Cultural Properties in Sado.'

[https://www.city.sado.niigata.jp/z\\_ot/cultural\\_property/index.html](https://www.city.sado.niigata.jp/z_ot/cultural_property/index.html)



Temple Guardians: Ungyo 259 cm, Agyo 258 cm

Front cover image is one of the wooden Temple Guardians of Chonji Temple (Tangible Cultural Property of Sado City). This pair of statues has high artistic value and exhibits the style of the Kei School of Buddhist Sculpture.