

# Everything Began with a Plan to Connect the Sea of Japan and Lake Biwa by Railroad.

In the late 19th century, Japan took its first steps toward modernization. Railroads symbolized the development of civilizations, transporting people to a new era. The line connecting Nagahama, Tsuruga, and Imajo was one of the first important lines to be built. It is a treasure trove of railroad heritage, telling the story of the dawn of Japanese railways. This heritage lives on to this day — join us on a journey through a century of memories.

## The Railroad Heritage Corridor Linking Fukui and Shiga

For centuries, Nagahama City, Shiga Prefecture; Tsuruga City, Fukui Prefecture; and Imajo in Minamiechizen Town, Fukui Prefecture prospered as key transportation hubs. Nagahama served as a terminal for water and land transportation, connecting the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean. In Tsuruga, railroads and ports connected land and sea transportation. Imajo served as a base for railroads that passed through the mountains. As Japan modernized in the late 19th and early 20th century, key railroad routes connected these three places, and they helped support Japan's cultural and economic development.



NAGAHAMA

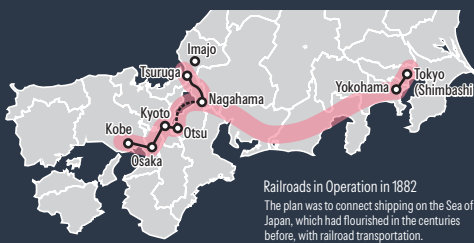
TSURUGA

MINAMIECHIZEN

A Journey through Modernization, Connecting Yesterday to Today

### 1 Building the Most Important Route Connecting the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean

1869, aimed to connect the major cities in eastern and western Japan with the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean. In addition to the main Tokyo–Kyoto line, there were three branch lines: Tokyo–Yokohama, Kyoto–Kobe, and Tsuruga–Lake Biwa. At the suggestion of Inoue Masaru, then-Director General of the Railway Bureau, Nagahama was chosen as the base for transportation on the lake, due to its prosperity as a transit point for goods from the North region of Japan, and its willingness to serve as a railroad hub. In 1882, just ten years after Japan's first railroad opened, the Nagahama–Tsuruga line began operation. Two years later, the Yanagase Tunnel opened, marking the start of the Hokuriku Line's history. In 1892, Extension construction to Toyama of the Hokuriku Line began, based on a plan for state-run railroad lines. The route connecting Tsuruga and Imajo was particularly important, but the steep hills along the way pushed the limits of the railroad technology of the era. Workers overcame many difficulties to extend the Hokuriku Line, section by section, and the Tsuruga–Fukui route opened in 1896.



### 2 The Nagahama–Tsuruga–Imajo Corridor Flourishes with the Opening of the Railroad

In 1882, the railroad line between Nagahama and Tsuruga was opened, and two years later the line was extended to Ogaki, making Nagahama Station a major terminal connecting Tsuruga to the north, Ogaki to the east, and Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe via railroad ferry service. Nagahama Station was located next to the port and cargo warehouses of the railroad ferries. There were many stores in the surrounding area, including forwarding agencies, and brokerage businesses that loaded and unloaded cargo. At the time, many people would come to watch and ride the steam trains. Trains would stop at Tsuruga and Imajo Stations to refuel, in order to make it through steep, mountainous areas. Vendors began to take advantage of this, selling items like newspapers to waiting passengers; this also led to the popularity of boxed meals like the sea bream sushi sold at Tsuruga Station, as well as the Imajo soba noodles sold by a stand that opened on the platform of Imajo Station in 1930. As more and more people traveled during the 20th century, these stations became even busier, with many locomotives, facilities, and staff members at both.



The Former Nagahama Station (circa 1897)

### 3 The End of the Old Hokuriku Line

With the completion of the Hokuriku Tunnel in 1962, the section through Yamanaka Pass between Tsuruga and Imajo was closed; then, in 1964, the Yanagase Line was also closed. The railroad heritage of those days, a reminder of the old Hokuriku Line, has been preserved unchanged as a cultural property closely connected to the community.



Opening of the Hokuriku Tunnel  
The Hokuriku Tunnel was the longest in Japan at the time. When this tunnel opened, the section through Yamanaka Pass was closed.

# The Railway That Crossed the Sea

## The Railway of Miracle and Trajectory that Connected with the World

### Connecting Japan and Europe

#### through Europe–Asia

#### International Train Service

As a result, Tsuruga Port was designated as an international port in 1899. After that, when the Trans-Siberian Railway across Russia was fully opened, regular trips between Tsuruga and Vladivostok were established, making this the shortest route from Japan to Europe. In 1912, Europe–Asia international train service was opened between Shimbashi in Tokyo and Kanegasaki (Tsuruga Port), for direct travel to Europe via Vladivostok. Tsuruga Port became Japan's gateway to the world.

### Tsuruga, the “Port of Humanity,”

#### and the Story of “Visas for Life”

In 1940, during World War II, Sugihara Chiune served as vice-consul at the Japanese consulate in Lithuania; in order to save Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, he defied his orders from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo, and issued these refugees “Visas for Life.” Tsuruga Port is also known as the “Port of Humanity,” because it was the port where the Jewish refugees saved by these visas came ashore. The people of Tsuruga warmly welcomed these refugees by opening public baths to be used for free, and by giving the refugees apples and other fruits. Words of gratitude from these Jewish refugees are still preserved in Tsuruga.

### Steamer Ship at Kanegasaki Pier (circa 1930)

Tsuruga Port connected to places as far away as Paris, France. The city bustled with both foreign and Japanese travelers using the Europe–Asia international train service.



### Route Map

The railroad connected Tsuruga to Europe across the sea — with a single ticket, travelers could go from Shimbashi Station in Tokyo to Paris.



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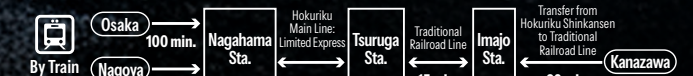
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Japan Heritage Official Site



@tunnel-sanpo (Instagram)



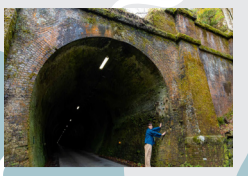


# Map of Japan Heritage Cultural Properties

- Cultural Properties
- Japan Heritage Story Area
- Hokuriku Shinkansen Line
- JR Line
- Hapi-Line
- Expressway



**Tunnels of the Old Hokuriku Line**  
These railroad tunnels along the Old Hokuriku Line can be found mainly in Tsuruga City and Minami-echizen Town, Fukui Prefecture. Eleven still remain today.



**10 Yamanaka Tunnel (1170 m)**  
This is the longest tunnel between Tsuruga and Imajo. The Imajo end still has the remains of a switchback that helped trains make their way up the steep slope.

**Imajo Station Water Tower and Coal Supply Platform**



Imajo Station's old water tower and coal supply platform, which were used to refuel steam locomotives, can still be seen at the station, for a unique contrast to today's railroad.

**View of Tsuruga Port**



Look out to the west from the Mt. Tezutsu Observation Tower for a panoramic view of Tsuruga Port, the Tsuruga Peninsula, and Kehi no Matsubara pine grove, or off to the east to see Nakaikemi Wetland.

**Megane ("Glasses") Bridge**



This brick railroad bridge was built in 1881, and railroad tracks once ran across it.

- 9 Iradani Tunnel (467 m)
- 8 Ashitani Tunnel (223 m)
- 7 Magaridani Tunnel (260 m)
- 6 No. 2 Kannonji Tunnel (310 m)
- 5 No. 1 Kannonji Tunnel (82 m)

- 4 Sorojidani Tunnel (401 m)
- 3 Funagaya Tunnel (64 m)
- 2 Habara Tunnel (979 m)

**View of Suizu**



Scenery so beautiful, they once made announcements to alert passengers to one of the finest views available from any train along the Hokuriku Line.

## Minami-echizen Town

**Imajo-shuku Post Town**

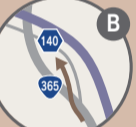


Learn about the history and highlights of Imajo, which prospered both as a post town and as a railway town. The perfect place to start a stroll.



**Kotone Tunnel (56m)**

Completed in 1881, and the oldest tunnel in Japan that still retains its appearance from when it was built. The tunnel was built to the standards of the day, so its 6.2 m height and 16.7 m length may feel



**Yanagase Tunnel (1352 m)**

It took four years of work before this tunnel opened in 1884, and it was only the second railway tunnel anywhere in Japan built entirely by Japanese engineers. At 1,352 m, it was also the longest tunnel in Japan to date.



**1 Former Tsuruga Port Sta. Lamp Bldg.**



One of Japan's oldest railway buildings, built in 1882.

**2 Former Tsuruga Port Sta. Bldg. (Tsuruga Railway Museum)**



A recreation of the Tsuruga Port Station building, which served as a terminal for the Europe-Asia International Express.

**3 Former Owada Bank Headquarters Building**



This bank was built in 1927 by Kitamaebune trading ship owner Owada Shoshichi, and the father of Tsuruga's modernization. The building is now used for the Tsuruga Municipal Museum, and contains a variety of exhibits.

**4 Former Warehouses of the Standard Oil Company of New York (Tsuruga Red Brick Warehouse)**



Built in 1905 as oil warehouses.

**Don't Miss the Incredible 27 m Diorama!**  
Inside these warehouses you'll find restaurants, as well as a diorama depicting the townscape of Tsuruga in the mid 20th century.



**5 Former Nagahama Station Building (Nagahama Railway Museum)**

The oldest train station building still standing in Japan, built in 1882. A precious remnant of the early days of Japan's railroads.



**Stone Plaques on Tunnels, Now in Nagahama**

Stone plaques inscribed by figures such as Ito Hirobumi, the first prime minister of Japan, were displayed at major tunnels connecting Nagahama and Imajo. They have since been relocated to the Nagahama Railway Museum, where they can be found today.



**6 Keiunkan**



A guest house built in Nagahama in 1887, featuring a garden that has been designated a National Site of Scenic Beauty.

**7 Meiji Station Street**

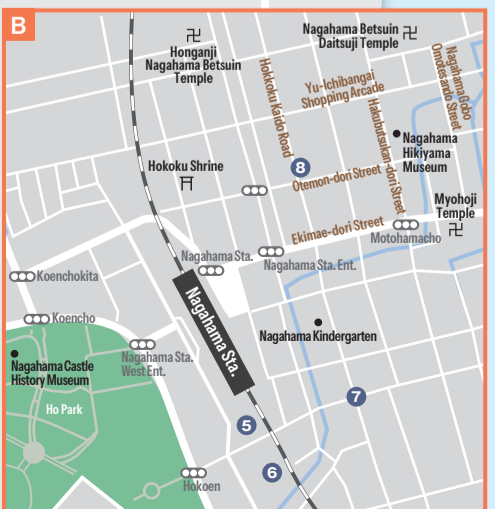


This street, with its walls made with reused wood from boats and gas-light-shaped streetlights, retains the old-fashioned atmosphere of when Nagahama flourished as a railroad town in the Meiji era (1868-1912).

**8 Kurokabe Glass Shop**



This Western-style wooden building was originally built as a bank in 1900. Today, it has become a symbol of this popular sightseeing destination.



**Class-D51 No. 793 Steam Locomotive**

A class-D51 steam locomotive, known for pulling trains through steep mountainous terrain, is on display alongside a class-ED70 electric locomotive, which came into use following the electrification of the Hokuriku Main Line.

**The Post Town of Kinomoto**



A post town that prospered due to its location along the way to Kinomoto Jizoin Temple, and still known for its charming old-fashioned atmosphere.

**5 Former Nagahama Sta. Bldg. (Nagahama Railway Museum)**

40 min. **A** North on Natl. Rt. 8 or Sazanami-Kaido Road, then turn right onto Natl. Rt. 365

**Remains of Nakanogo Sta.**

8 min. **B** North on Natl. Rt. 365, then turn right onto Natl. Rt. 140

**Yanagase Tunnel**

**Kotone Tunnel**

15 min. **C** Turn right onto Natl. Rt. 8  
**D** Turn left onto Natl. Rt. 476

**2 Former Tsuruga Port Sta. Bldg. (Tsuruga Railway Museum)**

**4 Former Warehouses of Std. Oil Co. of NY (Tsuruga Red Brick Warehouse)**

**Kashimagari Tunnel**

10 min. **E** Take local roads (toward Habara & Ohida)

**Habara Tunnel**

**Funagaya Tunnel**

**Sorojidan Tunnel**

**F** Turn right onto Natl. Rt. 207

**No. 1 Kannonji Tunnel**

**No. 2 Kannonji Tunnel**

**Magaridani Tunnel**

**Ashitani Tunnel**

**Iradani Tunnel**

**Yamanaka Tunnel**

**Dead-End Tunnel**

**Remains of Yamanaka Signal Station**

**Yamanaka Rock Shed**

**Remains of Ogiri Sta.**

10 min. **G** Turn left onto Natl. Rt. 365

**Imajo Machinami Information Center (inside Imajo Station)**

All travel times and distances shown are estimates.

## Local Favorites

**Imajo Soba**

The Imajo soba noodle stand was built on the station platform in 1930, and these noodles came to be known nationwide as the flavor of rest and relaxation in the Hokuriku region.



**Sea Bream Sushi (Tsuruga Area)**

Pressed sushi made from sea bream caught in and around Tsuruga Bay. These boxed meals were originally sold at Tsuruga Station, while passengers waited for the additional engine to be added to or removed from their train.



**Grilled Mackerel Somen Noodles**

A Nagahama classic, made by simmering grilled mackerel in a sweet and savory broth, then cooking somen noodles in that same broth.

