

Sado Island Sites Overview

Discoveries unearthed from ruins indicate that Sado Island has been inhabited since 10,000 years ago. In a Japanese creation myth found in the oldest history book Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters), Sado appears as the seventh island of a Japan consisting of many islands. In the same creation myth found in the Nihonshoki (Chronicles of Japan), the Island of Sado is fifth to appear, along with its twin fellow, the Island of Oki.

Sado was already one of the independent provinces that comprised Japan in the Nara Period (late 6th Century to early 7th Century) and was designated an island of exile. Until medieval times, many court nobles and intellectuals who lost in politics were exiled to Sado. Exiles include Hozumi Asomioyu in 722, a poet who criticised the imperial family, Emperor Juntoku in 1221 who lost the Jokyu Disturbance, a Buddhist monk Nichiren in 1271, who criticised the Kamakura Shogunate and other schools of Buddhism, and Zeami in 1434, a Noh actor and playwright who incurred the shogun's wrath.

As seen in the Tales of Times Now Past written in the late Heian Period (late 12th century), Sado was known as an island that produced gold. Recognising its potential, Ieyasu Tokugawa, a shogun, promoted development of gold and silver mines by placing Sado under the direct control of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Gold and silver produced on Sado underpinned the finances of the shogunate.

The prosperity of the gold mine attracted mining engineers, miners, carpenters, surveying technicians, merchants, fishermen, and so on, and caused a rapid rise in population and a demand for food. By making use of mining technologies, new paddy fields were developed on coast terraces. To secure operation materials required at the mine, such as charcoal and timber, forests in the mountains were managed as public forests under the ultimate control of the Sado Commissioner's Office.

With its well-looked after forests and farmland, Sado was the last natural habitat of the wild Japanese crested ibis (toki), an internationally protected bird. Although toki could be found anywhere on the island until the end of the Edo Period (1603-1867), it became endangered, due to overhunting and the deteriorating living environment after the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Japanese crested ibises went extinct in 2003, but then artificial insemination with crested ibises presented by the Chinese government started in 1999, and the first baby bird was born in that year. After 2000, baby birds were raised with increasing success, and related officials and people made concerted efforts to provide a more habitable environment for toki. Since ten toki were released back into the wild in 2000, people have been tackling local challenges, with a goal to release an increased number of bred toki into the skies of Sado.¹

¹ From [The History of Sado](#)

Ogi Area Map





1) Ogi Town

Ogi Town (小木), located on Sado Island's southern coast, is a small port town known for taraibune, wooden tub-shaped boats, that were originally used for collecting seaweed, shellfish and other things from the waters around Ogi. Short taraibune boat rides are available at Ogi Port and nearby Yajima and Kyojima.

This sleepy little town really comes alive for three days in late August when it hosts the Earth Celebration, a festival celebrating global culture and international music put on by the world renowned Kodo Taiko group. People come from all over the world to the festival and Ogi's harbor area gets transformed into a little tent city.



2) Yajima and Kyojima

Yajima and kyojima are two picturesque islands located off the coast of Ogi, which borders the sea southwest of the island of Sado (Sadogashima) in Niigata Prefecture.

Connected by a bright red arched bridge, these two islets are surrounded by clear turquoise water, making it a very picturesque landscape. It's possible to explore this idyllic place by way of a small round boat typical of the island of Sado, called a tarai-bune.

But these two small islands are more than just an attractive landscape, both are linked to a legend. The smallest, Kyojima, means "the island of the sutra". It's said that in the thirteenth century, Nichiro, a disciple of the monk Nichiren, sent into exile on the island of Sado by the military government of Kamakura, was shipwrecked on this island while travelling to announce to his master that he had been granted forgiveness. Nichiro would have recited sutra (kyo in Japanese) throughout the night spent on the island. Today, there is a small house with a thatched roof on this tiny piece of land surrounded by the sea, like something out of a fairytale.

Much larger than its neighbor, Yajima is lined with jagged rocks. At low tide, you can walk around and admire the clear waters - with appropriate shoes, of course! Its name means "arrow island", because a kind of bamboo (*Pseudosasa japonica*) is grown there, famous for use in the manufacture of arrows. In the famous 12th century book "The Tale of the Heike", there is mention of the samurai Yorimasa Minamoto, who, in 1153, killed a nue, a fantastical creature from Japanese mythology, with a bamboo arrow from Yajima.

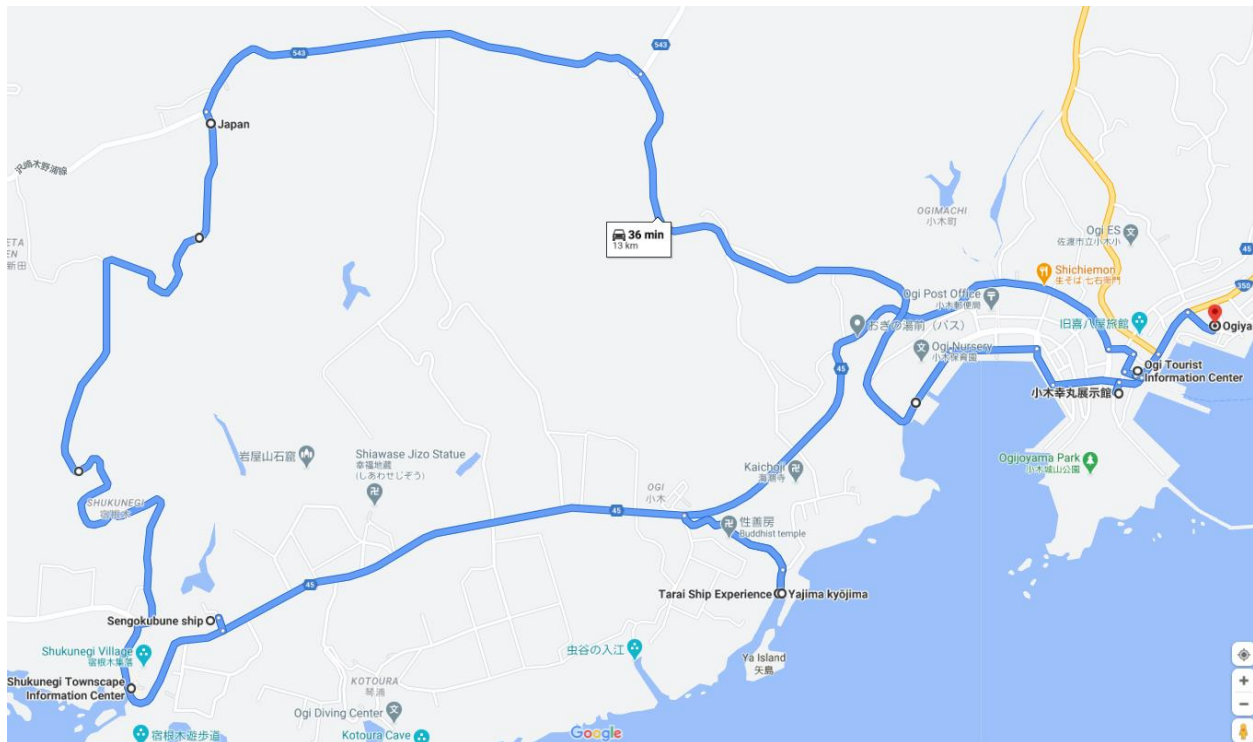
On Sado island, you can see the last tarai-bune. These little oval-shaped boats, invented in the 1880s, made of cedar wood and bamboo, were mainly used by women for seaweed fishing and to catch shellfish such as turbo cornutus (sazae) or abalone (awabi), popular in Japan. These boats were only found around Sadogashima and on the coasts of the former province of Echigo (in present-day Niigata Prefecture). There are currently only about 200 of these "bowl boats" (tarai means bowl and fune or bune, boat), used in half a dozen fishing villages in Sado, mainly for tourism. The port of Ogi, Yajima and Kyojima are the three places where you can take short trips (about 10 minutes) in tarai-bune, accompanied by a rower in local costume or paddling alone.

In Hayao Miyasaki's famous animated film "Spirited Away", Chihiro can be seen for a moment aboard a tarai-bune.

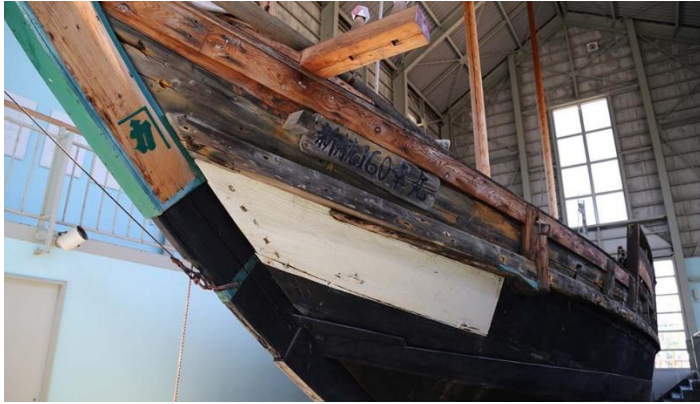


3) Shukunegi Village

Having been a port since the medieval times, Shukunegi went through the prosperous 17th century brought about by Sado Kinzan Gold Mine, and developed as a kitamaebune port of call for the merchant shipping industry. Facing a small inlet, Shukunegi is characterised by the crowded rows of over 100 houses built with plate walls made from ship planks, and it has been designated as a National Important Preservation Area for Traditional Buildings and Architecture. Three private houses are open to the public (admission charges required), and the entire Shukunegi village represents a history of involvement in ship-related industries.



Ogi Bike Route



4) Saiwaimaru

Saiwaimaru is a Japanese-style wooden ship which belonged to the Kan-uemon Hasegawa family who were in the shipping business for three-generations in old Teradomari Town. Later, it was donated to Ogi Town. The ship made round trips over the Sado Straits until 1961, carrying daily commodities from Teradomari, and bamboo, charcoal and firewood from Ogi. Saiwaimaru measures 19.1 metres in length and 3.8 metres in width, with a mast height of 13.0 metres, and reminds us of the booming shipping industry of the olden times.



5) Omiyage Ichiba Ogiya

Connected with Sado Kisen's Ogi Port Terminal, Ogiya is a shopping centre offering a great selection of Sado specialties. The selection includes sea products, traditional crafts and famous confectionery. The cafe/restaurant offers a wide variety of menu options, such as kamameshi (rice cooked in a pot) with fresh seafood and set meals. Their specialty menu is "kamameshi with squid". The sumptuous dish consists of "Toki to Kurasu Sato", special rice recognised by Sado City, which is cooked in special broth, and colourful toppings of seafood including squid, shrimp and scallops, plus bamboo shoots and shiitake mushrooms.