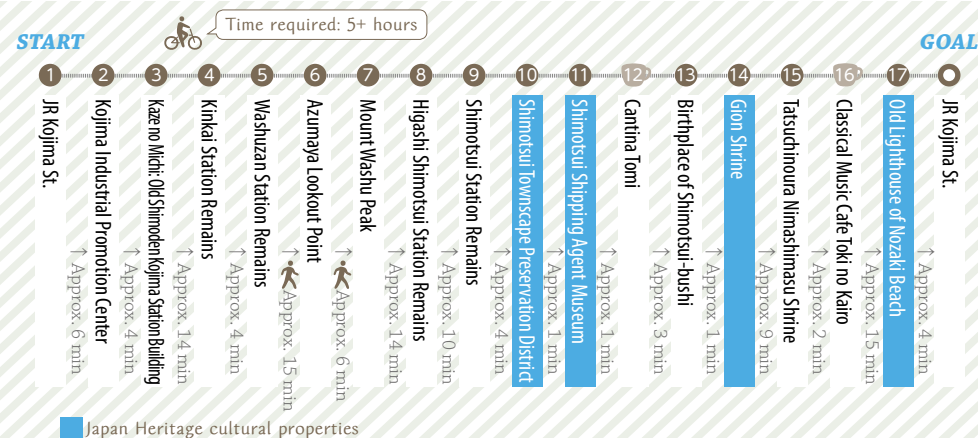


Shimotsui Wind Street Course

This cycling course take you to Shimotsui, a coastal town that first flourished as a port of call for the *kitamae-bune*, “north-ern-bound” merchant ships that traveled the length of Japan. It offers some incredibly scenic views, including the fishing port and the panorama from Mount Washu. Dubbed “Kaze no Michi” (Wind Street), it runs along a railway line formerly operated by the Shimotsui Dentetsu company that has been redeveloped for bicycle and pedestrian use only, making it the ideal cycling course.





Kurashiki Japan Heritage Story 2

A unique space spun from the dreams of men who conquered stormy seas

– A port of call for the *kitamae-bune*, a hometown for shipowners –

From the middle of the Edo period to the beginning of the Meiji period, the *kitamae-bune*, or “north-ern-bound” merchant ships, used the Nishimawari Kaigun (Western sea route), along the Nihonkai coast and through the Seto Inland Sea, to travel between Hokkaido in the north and Osaka in the south. At each port of call along the way they would load up with local specialty products and sell what they had already picked up. In present-day Shimotsui and Tamashima Island you can still find traces of the prosperity and hopes that the ships brought with them over the stormy seas.

At ports of call the *kitamae-bune* would buy local products at low prices, while selling wares from other ports at a good profit. The *kitamae-bune* captains had a strong understanding of each area, its industries and needs, and so ensured the ships functioned as floating trading houses; the goods transported southwards to Osaka included such Hokkaido specialties as herring, salmon, and *kombu* (kelp), while the northbound ships would take rice, salt, cotton, and sake. During the Kanei era (1624-1644), Shimotsui port was developed, together with Ushimado port, as a public-facing reception port for the Okayama domain; it flourished as a port where ships travelling along east-west routes would wait for favorable tides, as well as an importantly positioned port linking Kojima to Shikoku island for ships travelling along north-south routes. Here in Shimotsui, many goods were traded, including dried sardines, boiled herring, rice, and soybeans. Ships loaded up salt harvested from the Seto Inland Sea, which was prized for its ability to keep fish fresh, while off-loading coal destined to be used on the salt fields. During its peak, it is said that some 50-60 ships would be moored at the port at any one time. Today, you can get a sense of the scale of the shipping trade at Gion Shrine, overlooking narrow alleys that still retain something of the atmosphere of those times, for its *tamagaki* fence posts are engraved with many of the places from where traders came:

Echigo, Kaga, Satsuma, Chikuzen, Iyo, Osaka, and many more. Today, Shimotsui is still home to the family residence of the Nozakis, who made their fortune with the *kitamae-bune*, while in Kojima you can find the home of Nozaki Buzaemon, who was known as “the salt field King”. The land reclamation and port construction work that eventually was to result in Tamashima port began during the years of Mizunoya Katsutaka's lordship of the Bichu Matsuyama domain. In 1671, an embankment was completed, starting at Otoshima and linking Amidasan Island, where Haguro shrine is located, and Kashiwajima Island. The embankment stretched some 391m between Amidasan and Kashiwajima Islands and was 53m wide. Wholesalers were invited to the area and efforts to build it into a port town began. Cotton grown across Bichu accounted for some 80% of the goods loaded onto *kitamae-bune* at Tamashima port, while iron and copper produced in the Bichu Matsuyama domain were also key goods leaving the port. In turn, dried sardines and boiled herring, both used as cotton plant fertilizers, represented the bulk of the goods unloaded at Tamashima. On the pillars and beams of the warehouses still standing in the old port town, you can see the damage made by insects trying to get to the large quantities of boiled herring they once contained.

Start the Shimotsui Wind Street Course here!

1 JR Kojima Station (west exit)

The west exist of Kojima Station is your starting point when heading to Shimotsui.



Kojima Industrial Promotion Center



The arcade in front of the station, where jeans sway in the breeze

Get set up with a denim-decorated bike

2 Kojima Industrial Promotion Center (Rent Bicycles)

Drop by this Industrial Promotion Center to hire yourself a bicycle. All bikes for hire are electric bikes featuring a denim-inspired design. You can reserve bikes via the Center's website, six months to one day in advance. (Reservations for the same day are by telephone only).

☎086-441-5123 ☎9:00-17:00 ☎Tuesday (excluding national holidays, closed Wednesday instead), year-end 🚲Electric bicycle, ¥500 (1 day)

You can also hire bicycles from the Tourist Information inside JR Kojima Station (see p46)



A bicycle with an original denim design



A charmingly retro station building

3 Kaze no Michi: Old Shimoden Kojima Station Building

Kaze no Michi (Wind Street) is the name given to the former railway line that winds around the foothills of Mount Washu. The track was once operated by Shimotsui Dentetsu, a railway company more usually nicknamed Shimoden. Operations ceased in 1990 and the track was turned into a route for cyclists and walkers. This is only Shimoden station building that remains standing today.



The old station name sign still remains



Take a little trip

Mount Washu

If you've made it to the peak of Mount Washu, walk another 10 min to drop into the Visitor Center and Rest House!

Access

- Approx. 30 min by train from JR Okayama Station to Kojima Station on the Seto-Ohashi Line
- Approx. 29 min by bus to Washuzan Daini Tenbodai from JR Kojima Station on a Shimoden bus (Shimotsui Loop Line Tokohai-go)



Discover more about Mount Washu

A Mount Washu Visitor Center

The Visitor Center features displays about the nature and history of Mount Washu, as well as the history of the Seto Ohashi Bridge. Make your exploration of the area more enriching by finding out more about the mountain here.

- ☎086-479-8660
- 🕒9:00-17:00 (Apr-Sep), 9:00-16:30 (Oct-Mar)
- 📅Year-end (Dec 29-Jan 3)
- 💰Free



Engraved with the lyrics to a Shimotsui folk song

B Shimotsui-bushi Kahi Song Monument



This monument is engraved with the opening lyrics to Shimotsui-bushi, a famous local folk song: "oh, the port of Shimotsui / easy to sail into, easy to depart".



A place to pick up souvenirs, eat, and take a break

C Mount Washu Rest House

As well as a shop and a restaurant, the Rest House has space where you can relax and even a breastfeeding room. If you visit the restaurant, try the always-popular local specialty *takomeshi*, rice steamed with octopus pieces.

- ☎086-479-9164
- 🕒9:00-17:30 (Restaurant is open 11:00-14:00 (last orders) on weekdays, 11:00-15:00 (last orders) on weekends and national holidays)
- 📅None



Washu Takomeshi Set, ¥1,430

The go-to lookout point on Mount Washu

D Mount Washu Second Lookout Point

Easily accessible from the nearest bus stop and car park, this lookout point is the most popular among visitors to Mount Washu. With its benches and telescopes, the Second Lookout Point is the perfect place to spend time taking in the view of the Seto Inland Sea.



Get back on the bike from the Washuzan Station Remains

The next station some 500m along from Washuzan Station

8 Higashi Shimotsui Station Remains

Set off again on "Wind Street" and head for Shimotsui.



Carriages remain at this end-of-the-line station

9 Shimotsui Station Remains

Shimotsui Station was the final stop on the Shimotsui Dentetsu line. Today, some of the carriages that once carried passengers along the line have been conserved thanks to the efforts of Shimoden and Shimotsui Minato Densha Hozonkai (Shimotsui Port Train Conservation Society), a local community group.

- ☎086-472-1289 (Kojima Station Tourist Information)



With their nano-gauge (at just 762mm), these railway carriages are unusual in Japan

Focus

Shimotsui Castle Remains

Today, Kojima is a peninsula, but it was once an island, as suggested by its name—Kojima, meaning single or lone island. To the north of this lone island there once lay a shallow inland sea, Kibi no Anaumi, which separated Kojima from the mainland. This inland sea was a key route for ships traversing the Seto Inland Sea. Kibi no Anaumi was fed into by a number of large rivers, including Takahashi River, Asahi River, and Yoshii River. This meant that from the late middle-ages until the early modern period, large volumes of sediment built up in this inland sea, eventually leading to the route around the south of Kojima becoming preferred as the primary shipping route. This is how Shimotsui came to be considered a key location in the Seto Inland Sea by army and navy alike.

In the 16th century, Ukita Hideie ordered a citadel to be built in this very Shimotsui. After the domain was taken over by Ikeda Tadatsugu in 1603, large-scale improvements were undertaken at the direction of the senior retainer Ikeda Nagamasa, leading to the completion of its form as



a fully-fledged early-modern castle building in 1606. Shimotsui Castle is built on a hill, 89 meters above sea level, to the rear of Shimotsui Bay, and commands a sweeping view of the Seto Inland Sea. It was used by successive lords Ikeda Yoshiyuki and Ikeda Yoshinari before being abandoned in 1639 under the *ikkoku-ichijo* ("one castle per province") order, just thirty-some years after its completion.

Today, all that remains of the original castle is the stone walls. However, the area where Shimotsui Castle was built has recently been developed into the Seto Ohashi Kakyo Memorial Park, where visitors can learn about the castle and its history.

A port town still soaked in its thriving *kitamae-bune* history

10 Shimotsui Townscape Preservation District

From the mid-Edo period onwards, Shimotsui became a regular port of call for the *kitamae-bune*, which in turn brought prosperity as a town of lodgings and merchant traders. Today, many merchant houses used as boiled herring (fertilizer) warehouses still remain. The historical townscape has been preserved into modern times thanks to buildings retaining original features such as roofing tiles fireproofed with mud daub, the black and white geometry of the namakokabe wall finish, *mushiko-goshi* lattice windows, and vertically latticed doors.



The main pillar of the "Aren't you finished yet?" bridge railing. The name comes from what local prostitutes used to call out to *kitamae-bune* sailors from the bridge that once stood here.

A group of common-use wells. Common-use wells, which were previously shared by several homes, are dotted around the district.



Learn about the history of Shimotsui in this museum

11 Shimotsui Shipping Agent Museum

This museum is housed in a restored building once used by a shipping agent who made his fortune trading with the *kitamae-bune*. The many displays here tell of the history and culture of Shimotsui, as well as the *kitamae-bune* ships themselves. It is a place of learning but also gives a tangible sense of the taste of a merchant house of the time.

☎086-479-7890 🕒9:00-17:00 (last entry 16:30)
🗓Tuesdays (excluding national holidays, closed Wednesday instead), year-end (Dec 29-Jan 3) 🆓Free



Model of a *kitamae-bune*

This mark indicates destinations that are Japan Heritage cultural properties.

An eye-catching eatery built around the pillars and beams of an old herring storehouse

12 Cantina Tomi

This restaurant is located in the grounds of the Shimotsui Shipping Agent Museum. Here you can enjoy Japanese or Italian food made to show off local ingredients in the Kura Hall, built where a *kura* (storehouse) used to store boiled herring fertilizer once stood. As well as the Kura Set Meal (see photo), many diners are fans of the *anago-don* (grilled saltwater eel served on a bowl of rice), which is only served on days when fresh eel can be sourced.

☎086-479-9456 🕒Weekdays: 11:30-14:00, 17:30-21:00 (last orders) / Weekends and national holidays: 11:30-14:00, 18:00-21:00 (last orders) 🗓Tuesdays, first Wednesday of each month (third Monday of each month open for lunch only) 🍽(e.g.) Kura Set Meal, ¥1,760



Kura Set Meal, ¥1,760



Focus

Sailcloth

Sailcloth (*hampu* in Japanese) is a thick and sturdy plain-woven fabric made from multi-stranded cotton yarn (its weight is generally more than 8oz (=approx. 227g) per square meter).

Japanese sailcloth was invented in the late Edo period by Kuraku Matsumemon, of Takasago City in Hyogo Prefecture. His sailcloth was used in the sails of *kitamae-bune* and other ships and quickly become ubiquitous. The emergence of Kuraku's sailcloth is even said to have prompted a change in the shipping technology of the time. By the early modern period, spun fabrics took over in popularity thanks to the impact of the industrial revolution.

The history of Kurashiki sailcloth dates back to 1888. That was the year when husband and wife Takeyari Ishigoro and Ume founded a textile factory in the Gonai area of Kojima. Their eldest son later initiated the production of sailcloth in that same factory. Sailcloth has been used as an industrial and commercial material, primarily for lorry sheets, school bags, tents, gymnastics mats, and the fabric tops of vaulting boxes, but its role is changing with the times and today it is attracting considerable attention as an apparel fabric.

Kurashiki Hampu, the brand name of the sailcloth produced by the same Takeyari family, is a



first-class, luxury sailcloth beautifully and evenly woven right to its selvedge (fabric edges), made by craftsmen and women on carefully cared for shuttle looms that have been out of production since the late 1960s. The texture of this fabric is robust yet bursting with warmth, thanks to the skill of its crafters and the natural fibers from which it is woven. The tradition of sailcloth production continues to be passed down and currently around 70% of all sailcloth made in Japan is made here.

Baistone Main Shop

414-2 Sobara, Kurashiki ☎086-485-2112 🕒10:00-17:00
🗓Year-end 🍽(e.g.) Basic Tote Bag (small landscape), ¥4,400;
1m of No. 8 Sailcloth Fabric, ¥1,650

A monument standing on the coast

13 Birthplace of Shimotsui-bushi

On the Western tip of Shimotsui Fishing Bay stands a monument inscribed with the words, "The Birthplace of Shimotsui-bushi", which is a famous local folk song. This is also a popular fishing spot, where you can enjoy the pleasant combination of warm sunlight and refreshing sea breeze.



A beloved shrine, known as "Shimotsui's very own Gion"

14 Gion Shrine

Sitting on a small hill with an elevation of 22m above sea level, this shrine is set in a spot from where you can look out over the Shimotsui port. Its *tamagaki* fence posts are engraved with the names of the owners of the *kitamae-bune*, who made donations to the shrine in order to ask the guardian deity of the sea for the safe passage of their ships.

☎086-479-9468



One of the official shrines listed in the *Englishiki Jinmyocho*, a list of important shrines compiled in 927

As featured in the film *Hirune Hime* (Napping Princess)

15 Tatsuchinoura ni Mashimasu Shrine

Located at the base of Seto Ohashi Bridge, this shrine boasts a panoramic view of the Shimotsui townscape. It is renowned as a shrine offering protection against fire. It is also known for appearing in the 2017 anime feature film *Hirune Hime* (Napping Princess) and is a popular destination for fans of the film from all over Japan.

☎086-472-5330



Feel as if you've travelled back in time in this unique space

16 Classical Music Cafe Toki no Kairo

This *meikyoku kissa* (a type of cafe where classical music is played) opened in the foothills of Mount Washu in 2015. Classical music is played inside the cafe, which is decorated with antique furniture and ornaments. This is a special place loved not just by locals but by music fans who travel long distances to visit.

☎070-5522-1622 ☎10:00-18:00 ☒Thursdays ☒(e.g.) Toki no Kairo Coffee, ¥600



The cafe walls are lined with portraits and photos of famous composers



Take the coastal route back to the station.



A wooden lighthouse from the late Edo period

17 Old Lighthouse of Nozaki Beach

Once you've made it back to Kojima from Shimotsui, make this your last sightseeing stop. This lighthouse was built in 1863 by Nozaki Buzaemon, as both a votive light offered to Shiogama Myojin, God of Salt, and a source of nighttime light for ships approaching and leaving the beach. This is a prime example of how Japanese lighthouses used to look, before the adoption of Western European-style lighthouse construction. Few such lighthouses remain across Japan, making this a precious heritage structure.

Focus

Famous Local Folk Song "Shimotsui-bushi"

Shimotsui-bushi opens with the lyrics: "oh, the bay of Shimotsui / easy to sail into, easy to depart / Easy to catch a tailwind, easy to avoid a headwind". Shimotsui-bushi is a folk song that has been sung since the Edo period, initially by sailors in parlors in the town's red-light district. The song was passed on to other areas by sailors on *kitamae-bune* ships, so that today similar folk songs can be heard in other ports on the Seto Inland Sea and along the Nihonkai coast.

By the final years of the Edo period, the *kitamae-bune* were making so much money that it was said that "a single voyage would bring a profit of a thousand *ryo*". By this time, they were constructed with a single large sail that would swell with the wind to propel the ships onwards. The "tailwind" (*matomo*) mentioned in the opening verse of Shimotsui-bushi refers to a wind blowing from behind a ship, in the direction of its travel. The "avoid a headwind" (*magiru*) refers to the technique



of moving the sail to the left and right, when encountering a headwind, in order to catch the wind diagonally and sail a zigzag course. In other words, the lyrics extol the virtues of Shimotsui port, namely how easily it can be entered and left and how favorable its winds.

Shimotsui-bushi is one of the most recognizable of all folk songs from Okayama Prefecture, and indeed is famous nationwide. In the fall of each year, the Shimotsui-bushi All-Japan Championship is held in Kojima to determine who is the Japan best singer of this particular song. The competition unfolds between many entrants, including men and women, young and old alike, from across the entire country.