

Sawara Appeals to Tourists

Sawara has preserved a touch of Edo era. ‘Little Edo’ is alive here now with the traditional townscape.

Some of the shop-fronts and warehouses still are as they were 100 to 200 years ago. A soba shop that makes black buckwheat noodles, with secret recipe that has long been inherited, and *sake* breweries that produce local-*sake* with traditional methods rigidly observed. You can taste *Sawara*’s history in every quarter.

Location: *Sawara* lies northeast of Chiba-ken, around 100km east of Tokyo and 27 km east of Narita Airport. *Sawara*’s business center comfortably sits on the Tone River, the second longest river in Japan.

Access: *Sawara* can be reached in two hours or so via Chiba by JR train (via Narita by private Keisei train) from Tokyo, or in one hour or so by non-stop coach from a bus stop near Tokyo Station.

Geography: *Sawara* is bounded on the north by Ibaraki-ken and on the south it rises up toward the tableland leading into Narita City. *Sawara*’s low land is occupied by paddy fields, quite fit for growing rice because of fertile soil.



Funa-Meguri—the Little Edo experience

Historic Townscape of Little Edo Sawara

Japanese Traditional Properties Preserved



History: The prosperous history of *Sawara* started in the late 1500s a bit earlier than Edo era. In 1590, *Tokugawa Ieyasu* was transferred to Edo, and tried a big project of diverting the course of the wild Tone River away from Edo so that it would flow far eastwards into the Pacific Ocean.

west side. The east side is supported by Yasaka shrine, and the west side by Suwa shrine. Yasaka Shrine hosts the summer festival, held on Friday through Sunday on the second week of July (altered to the third weekends if Friday falls on a day of single figure) and Suwa Shrine hosts the fall festival, held on Friday through Sunday on the second week of October.

The three objects of interest at the festivals are big dolls on the floats and authentic carvings surrounding the four sides of each float and the festival unique tunes, most of which are said to have been composed by a ‘*gidayu* reciter’ of Edo invited to *Sawara* by wealthy merchants.

The *Sawara* Grand Festival has a history of about three hundred years. There is something really dandyish and sophisticated about the festivals. The collective tradition of the festival is protected as ‘*Important Intangible Cultural Property*.’

Don’t forget to visit the Festival Float Museum to see the two big floats exhibited up close and get full knowledge of the festivals on video.



◀ Festival float

Ino Tadataka



In about 60 years’ time, the Tone River was reborn into the new route of transportation, fast and safe, to Edo. From *Sawara* river port, the freight ships carried to Edo (a population of over 1,000,000) many kinds of products from the farmland around *Sawara*, northern Japan and fishing villages along the Pacific Coast.

Past the mid Edo era, *Sawara* rose from a quiet village to a provincial center of commerce. The golden age of *Sawara* lasted until the late Meiji era.

Walk to Sawara preservation area

Start your tour from JR *Sawara* Station for the central part of *Sawara*’s historic area. Walk straight 50 meters, and you will find the tourist office at the corner on the left across the street. Be sure to pick up some information or voucher or map there. Let’s have ten minutes’ walk to the *Onogawa* River and enjoy nostalgic views along the riverside fringed with the willows. Then you can reach the bridge called ‘*Chukei-bashi*.’ Over the bridge runs the main street of *Sawara*, ‘*Katori-kaido*.’

The lovely district around some hundred meters along the main street and the *Onogawa* River is designated as ‘*Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings*’ by the government, preserving ‘Little Edo’ townscape with the Japanese traditional style of shop buildings and warehouses.



Chukei-bashi(center of town)

Three Gems of Sawara

Miraculously, *Sawara* has been preserving three gems for many years. They are ‘traditional townscape,’ ‘grand festivals’ in summer and fall and ‘great achievements of *Ino Tadataka*.’

◇ Traditional Townscape (Machi-nami)

The central part of *Sawara* was designated as ‘*Preservation District for Groups of Historic Buildings*,’ on Dec 10, 1996. And 8 shop-buildings and 5 warehouses attached to them are designated as ‘*important cultural properties*’ by Chiba Prefecture. *Ino Tadataka*’s former residence is also another historic building, designated as ‘*National Historic Site*.’

Sawara’s prosperous history is said to have started tens of years before the Tokugawa Shogunate was established in Edo. Several samurai families moved to the lowland of *Sawara* and started up the business of dealing in daily living necessities, such as breweries of *sake*, *miso* paste, soy sauce, etc.

Past the middle of Edo era, *Sawara* fought its way to the heyday of business activities. Just around this time, *Ino Tadataka*, (the successful businessman and later studious cartographer or mapmaker) was accepted as the tenth head of the *Inoh* Family, one of the substantial merchant families in *Sawara* village.

Many of the rich merchants ran their branch shops in Edo and adopted highly sophisticated culture and life style from Edo people. High-quality articles and goods were carried from Edo into *Sawara*. There is every reason to believe that lifestyle and thoughts of people of *Sawara* are apt to have an air of ‘Little Edo.’

◇ Grand Festivals in summer and fall

The *Onogawa* River divides *Sawara* into two parts; *Hon-juku*, the east side and *Shin-juku*, the

◇ Ino Tadataka’s Achievements

You must not overlook the chance to appreciate the excellence of a great man’s achievements. Head for the *Ino Tadataka* Memorial Museum, and you can inspect a large number of great *Tadataka*’s achievements, and tools that were used to draw up the maps. The entire things (2345 articles) he left behind are designated as ‘*National treasure* (Koku-ho).’

Tadataka was born at a small fishing village along the Pacific Ocean, northeast of Chiba. Probably he learned basic math and geometry at *tera-koya* (private instruction house for children) as a boy. But, there are no detailed records about his childhood.

At 17, *Tadataka* was adopted to the *Ino* Family as the husband to the family’s daughter *Michi*, aged 21. His studious and patient efforts made their fortune into the enormous bulk. At 50, he went up to Edo to study astronomy, surveying and calendar making. At 55, he set out on a half-year’s journey to Ezo (Hokkaido) to calculate the distance of one degree of meridian line. Successfully, he found almost the same figure as the one in the Dutch textbook. And, he spent 17 years surveying the whole Japan and completed the maps of Japan. At 73, he died in Edo.

On July 1853, when Commodore Perry, chief of the American squadron came to Japan off *Uraga coast*, he carried with him an accurate map of Japan bought at enormous price in Europe. That was the copied one drawn by *Ino Tadataka* tens of years before.



Ino Tadataka’s former residence