



Source: Katsushika Hokusai, Under the Mannen Bridge at Fukagawa (Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji); Tokyo Fuji Art Museum Collection Database

# The **Waterways** of Edo

— A Visitor's Guide to the Spirit of Tokyo —

Present-day Tokyo is lined with sleek, modern buildings, but prior to 1590, much of the area was **wetlands** populated by few people. However, under **Tokugawa Ieyasu**, founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the region became a bustling city. Ieyasu chose **Edo** for its flat terrain, which was ideal for transporting goods. Once in Edo, Ieyasu reclaimed land and built a **waterway network** to support people's lives by taking advantage of the rich water resources. As a result, Edo grew into a city of **one million people**, and today's Tokyo carries on that legacy.

### The “Lifeblood” of Edo: Canals and Waterways

One of the first things Tokugawa Ieyasu did was to dig canals such as the **Onagi River**. He recruited workers nationwide for this massive project, which transported castle materials and supported the city's daily needs. His web-like waterway network connected the sea to the inland areas, ensuring the smooth flow of both people and goods. **Tokyo Bay**, known at the time as **Edo Minato**, served as a major hub where essential supplies like rice, salt, soy sauce, and wood were gathered from across the country. Merchants unloaded these goods at **kashi** (riverside markets) and distributed them throughout Edo via the waterways. Tokugawa Ieyasu's **water-centered city design** was



truly ahead of its time.

### Edo: A City Shaped by Waterways

Major cities around the world, including **New York, London, and Paris**, have all developed around areas bordering bodies of wa-

富嶽三十六景  
江戸橋

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# Tokyo Waterways Past and Present



Source: Katsushika Hokusai, Nihonbashi in Edo (Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji); Tokyo Fuji Art Museum Collection Database

ter. Before the age of railways and automobiles, sea and river transport played a vital role in supplying cities with everyday goods. Edo developed in much the same way. Waterways served not only for transport but also for travel and leisure, such as **boat outings**. Traces of this history persist in modern

Tokyo, seen in traditional *yakatabune* houseboats, scenic riverside walks, and the continued use of boats for daily transit. Although land transport now dominates, Tokyo still remains a city closely connected to water.



Jujo Sta.



## Edomae sushi

The Edo Shogunate built a sophisticated transport network, drastically speeding up the flow of goods to the capital. Since land transport was still underdeveloped, boats carried large amounts of goods such as rice, vinegar, fish, and other items. In Nihonbashi Koamicho, streets lined with soy sauce and vinegar wholesalers fueled the rise of Edomae sushi. Edomae sushi features fish from Tokyo Bay elevated by adding "a little extra effort" to the **fresh fish**. Such culinary wisdom was born from the large influx of fish flowing through the region.

Ikebukuro Sta.

## 1 Nihonbashi



Nihonbashi remains steeped in Edo-era tradition, serving as the historic hub for water transport and the starting point for the five great highways: Tokaido, Nakasendo, Nikko Kaido, Oshu Kaido, and Koshu Kaido. The Shuto Expressway is currently undergoing underground construction, and a new skyline will emerge in the future. Take a river cruise to experience the city from its historic waterways.

Ichigaya Sta.  
Yotsuya Sta.  
Shinanomachi Sta.

## 5 Hama-rikyu Gardens



Fed by Tokyo Bay, Edo's shiiori-no-ike (tidal ponds) were designed to shift in appearance with the rising and falling tides. Hama-rikyu Gardens is the only Edo period garden in Tokyo that has two shiiori-no-ike. The Tokugawa Shogun family used the land for falconry, later building a villa here. The historic Shogun Oagariba (Shogun's Landing Place), boat landing survives today, where visitors can enjoy the **waterside scenery** alongside seasonal beauty.



**3 Sumida River**

The Sumida River, once known as the Okawa (Big River), was a familiar place for the people of Edo. The river not only transported goods for business but also provided entertainment such as boat rides and fireworks for local people. Today, expansion continues of the approximately 7.5-mile-long **Sumida River Terrace**, which serves as a popular relaxation spot.



**2 Yagiri No Watashi**

The last remaining ferry crossing in Tokyo. Though ferries once criss-crossed the city, vital for Edo period daily life, most have since disappeared. Operating since the early Edo period, this **ferry** offers a leisurely journey into a nostalgic era.



**4 Onagi River**

This is a man-made canal that once transported many goods. It has played a major role in the local area's development since the Edo era. Once known as the Salt Road, these revitalized paths now offer a scenic walk that perfectly captures Tokyo's enduring heritage as a "city of water."



## The Atmosphere of Edo Lingers

# TOKYO Waterfront Map

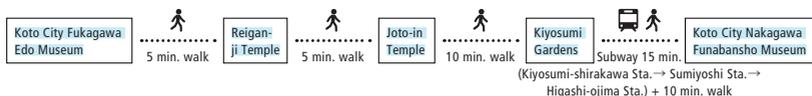
Many water-related places are scattered throughout modern-day Tokyo. Visit these places to immerse yourself in Edo and imagine life in that era. Here are the **perfect highlights** to guide your journey through history.



# A Leisurely Tour of Edo's Waterside Districts

Ordered by Tokugawa Ieyasu as a salt-transport canal, the Onagi River evolved into Edo's primary water-transport hub, driving the growth of districts like Fukagawa. This area east of the Sumida River is said to be the heart of the *shitamachi*, where artisans and merchants lived in the Edo period. Today it offers a quiet walking route away from the city's bustle.

\*For the latest information, please check our official website.



1:00 PM-2:00 PM

## Koto City Fukagawa Edo Museum

Dedicated to collecting and preserving historical documents about Fukagawa, it offers **hands-on exhibits** that bring the daily life of the Edo period closer to visitors. Discover local history and practical wisdom through a life-sized recreation of an Edo townscape, and feel like an edokko (a true child of Edo).

### Information

Please check our official website (Japanese only).

<https://www.kcf.or.jp/fukagawa/>



Provided by: Koto City Tourism Association



2:05 PM-2:25 PM

## Reigan-ji Temple

One of the Edo Six Jizo<sup>\*1</sup> "Seated Bronze Jizo Bodhisattva Statue," is enshrined here, a massive figure standing **9 feet tall**. This sanctuary also holds the grave of Matsudaira Sadanobu, an influential statesman who led the Shogunate through severe economic instability. He spent his later years in Fukagawa and served as the Lord of the Shirakawa Domain, the origin of the town name. Near the Onagi River, a vital Edo waterway, this temple provides a serene retreat.

### Information

(03) 3641-1523 / 1-3-32 Shirakawa, Koto-ku, Tokyo 135-0021

\*1 1 The Six Jizo of Edo: 1st: Danda Jizo (Honsen-ji) | 2nd: Hoju Jizo (Tozen-ji) | 3rd: Hoin Jizo (Taiso-ji) | 4th: Jiji Jizo (Shinsho-ji) | 5th: Jogaisho Jizo (Reigan-ji) | 6th: Nikko Jizo (Eitai-ji)



2:30 PM-2:35 PM 

## Joto-in Temple

This temple is the resting place of Kinokuniya Bunzaemon, a wealthy Hatchobori **timber merchant**. He built a massive fortune through close ties with the Shogunate and active trade. His life was deeply tied to the water through the city's timber-transport canals. Although the cemetery is closed, the grave and stone monuments are visible from outside the gate.

### Information

1-6-13 Miyoshi, Koto-ku, Tokyo 135-0022



 2:45 PM-3:35 PM

## Kiyosumi Gardens

Discover a beautiful **stroll-style garden** with ponds, artificial hills, and a dry landscape garden. While the Meiji-period garden was completed by Iwasaki Yatara, founder of Mitsubishi, its roots also lie in the Edo period, as part of the site sits on the former residence of the wealthy Edo merchant Kinokuniya Bunzaemon. Explore the large pond drawn from the Sumida River and a collection of rare stones. You can also visit the sukiya-style pavillion Ryotei.



### Information

(03) 3641-5892 (Kiyosumi Gardens Service Center)  
3-3-9 Kiyosumi, Koto-ku, Tokyo 135-0024  
Closed: Dec. 29 – Jan. 1  
9:00 AM – 5:00 PM (Last admission 4:30 PM)



4:00 PM-5:00 PM  

## Koto City Nakagawa Funabansho Museum

The Nakagawa Funabansho was a river guard post at Nakagawaguchi<sup>2</sup> that inspected boats on the Onagi River. It secured the flow of people and goods while maintaining order in Edo. A restored guard post inside the museum and archival displays offer visitors a glimpse into the **history and culture** of Edo-period water transport in the Kanto region.

### Information

(03) 3636-9091 / 9-1-15 Ojima, Koto-ku, Tokyo 136-0072  
Closed: Mondays (Open if Monday is a holiday, closed the following day), New Year Holidays (Dec. 29 – Jan. 3). \*Temporarily closed for maintenance or exhibit changes.  
9:30 AM – 5:00 PM (Last admission 4:30 PM)



\*2 Nakagawaguchi (historical name); the junction of the Onagi and Kyu-Nakagawa Rivers.



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[Journey Through Edo's Legacy]  
100 Selected sites to explore Edo history and culture across Japan  
<https://edolegacytravel.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/>



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