

# EXPERIENCE KESEN

*~ Kesen Excites People's Spirit of Romantic Adventure ~*

We are grateful for all of the support and encouragement we have received from all over the world in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.

We are continuously making efforts toward reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, but in order to truly regenerate the region that has been destroyed, it is important to learn about the local history and culture, and also work to carry this on into the future. Therefore, with this brochure, we want to communicate the charms of the Kesen region as a historical and cultural tourist destination.

The first series is "Kesen carpenter," which is a traditional style of architecture in Kesen.

## What is the Kesen region?

It is an area that used to be called "Former Kesen County," and was located in the southeastern part of Iwate Prefecture.

It consists of the coastal areas of Ofunato and Rikuzentakata, and the mountainous areas of Sumita.

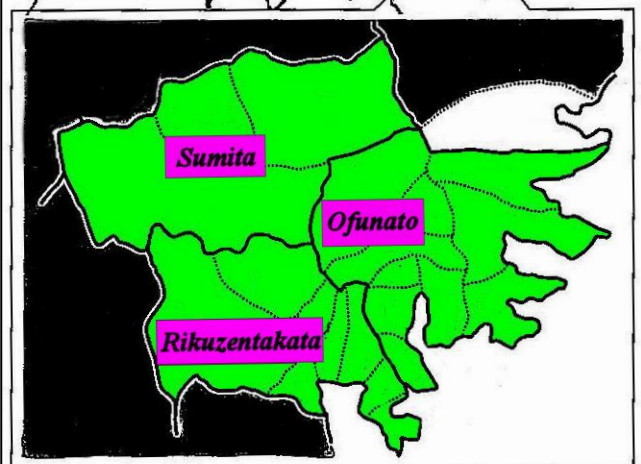
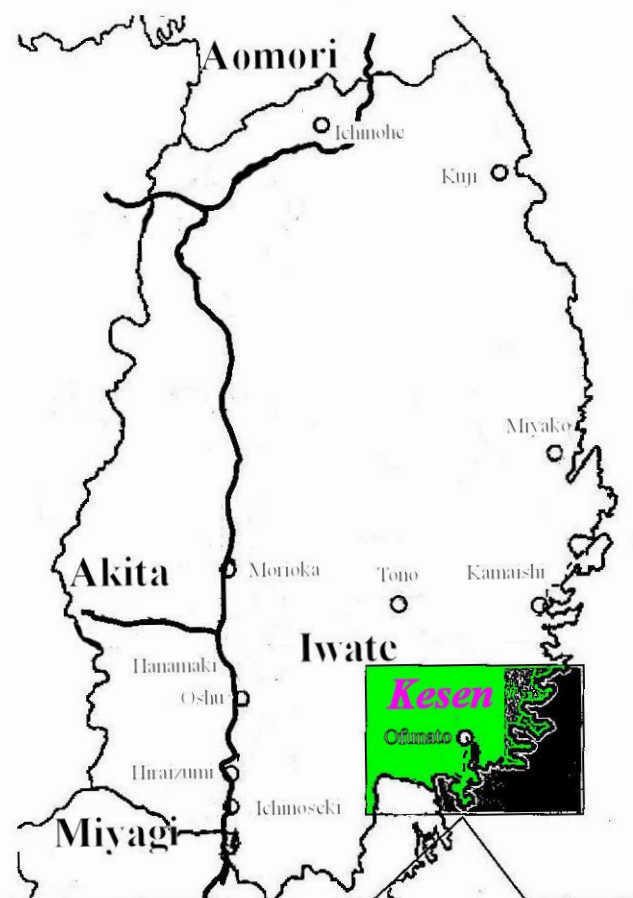
The villages facing the Pacific Ocean have an elongated mild climate, and are graced with the Japan Current. They have suffered many tragedies because of tsunami, but have successfully revived each time due to their strong willingness to survive.

The Kesen region is blessed with an abundance of forest resources such as the Akamatsu trees "Kesen cedar" and "Goyohinoki." The migrant Kesen carpenters and shipwrights made a business providing wood from these trees.

## Who are Kesen Carpenters?

They are a group of carpenters who moved around to various places in what was referred to since the Edo period as "southbound," or proceeding to the capital.

- (1) House carpenter and Miyadaiku  
Some house carpenters built Domiya shrines and temples using a technique, or stereotomy, called Sumikane.
- (2) The effect of migrant work year-round  
They improved their skills, enhanced their marketability, and became innovators of local culture.
- (3) Range of work  
They are versatile: In addition to architecture, they could craft anything with wood - from furniture, doors and windows, to even sculptures.
- (4) Wooden architecture project examples
  - ① Shrines and temples  
Importance placed on permanency and sublimity.
  - ② Private homes and stores  
In addition to practicality and functionality, an aesthetically appealing, durable, comfortable home is desired.



# Presently Existing Work by the Kesen Carpenters

## Kesen Carpenters Folklore Museum

The Kesen Carpenters Folklore Museum was built in order to show future generations the impressive architecture skills of the Kesen carpenters.

It was built with the architectural style of Kesen during the early Meiji era, and resembles a local private home. The materials used to build it are all local materials such as Kesen cedar.

The main house is a thatched wooden building. The massive roof trusses of the central pillar were built with thick, sturdy materials, and a spacious floor plan tells of the lives of the people of bygone days.

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1-237 Myoga Otomo Rikuzentakata,  
Iwate Prefecture

**TEL:** 0192-56-2911

**Website:** <https://sites.google.com/site/kesendaikusakandenshoukan/>

Free  
Toilet  
Shop



## Choanji Temple Gate

Choanji Temple Gate in Hikoroichi of Ofunato, which was known as the Kesen carpenters' best work, is a 20m high gate built completely with zelkova wood.

The temple gate was constructed in 1798. In this era, zelkova was Date clan's Otomeki, a tree the Date clan prohibited others from using. The gate was built with this zelkova. Even in Sendai, there were no buildings taller than the gate, so the gate was a symbol of defiance against the feudal lord. The feudal lord repeatedly ordered for it to be destroyed.

However, it was spared due to Master Kakunenboushuteishi's sharp-wit – it was allowed to be kept under one condition: no further construction can be done on the gate. That is why the gate has no sleeves or doors, a clear sign of it being an incomplete project!

**Address:** 〒022-0005

57 Choanji Hikoroichi Ofunato,  
Iwate Prefecture

## Fumonji Temple

Fumonji Temple is located in Yonesaki in Rikuzentakata, and is temple number 29 in the Oshu Sanjusankannon (the 33 temples that are visited during the Oshu Kannon Pilgrimage). The main hall was reconstructed in 1877, and has become the standard style of Kesen temples.

Within the precincts of the temple are the prefecture-designated natural monument crape myrtle, which are the biggest trees in Iwate. At the back is a 12.5 meter high three-storied pagoda (a cultural asset of Iwate Prefecture), as well as a large bronze Buddha statue.

The three-storied pagoda, the Great Buddha statue, and Nio Guardian statues are placed throughout a garden decorated with a row of enormous cedar trees. In early summer, azaleas bloom beautifully. The three-storied has a copper sheet roof and was built in 1809.

**Address:** 〒029-2206

181 Chitakesawa, Yonesaki  
Rikuzentakata, Iwate prefecture





# Presently Existing Work by the Kesen Carpenters

## The Chida Family Omido(Sanctuary)

The Chida family in Ryori, Sanriku had a jibutsudo, which is a room that holds a Buddha statue, This jibutsudo was called, "Omido (sanctuary)," and dates back to the middle of the Edo period.

It was luxuriously built entirely with zelkova (7.2 meters wide and 10 meters deep). In the front, there is a roof built over the steps leading up to the temple, and a transom with carvings on both sides. Inside is Shumi Dan (a dais for a Buddhist image). A golden Amitabha statue is enshrined within.

This figurine has a certification with it stating, "Enshrinement of Wooden Buddha Figurine Permitted on March 29th 1702." Jinbee, a 5th generation Chida, sent a request to Higashihonganji in Kyoto asking for the figurine. He left for Kyoto to pick it up, and carried it on his back to Ryori, Ofunato. The trip took him 6 months. The signature of Koji Sakyō, who is the sculptor of the Buddhist image, is on the request form the Chida family submitted.

Address: 〒022-0211

48 Sunagohama Ryori Sanriku Ofunato,  
Iwate Prefecture



Omido

Hinged double doors made of zelkova without use of any nails

## ~ (Kesen Local Gourmet) ~

### Ofunato Sanma Ramen



Ofunato is known as one of the leading saury fishing areas in the country. Sanma Ramen is a noodle dish made with these local fish. You can eat it at 7 restaurants in the city.

The dish is made-to-order; dried, mirin-flavored saury are grilled one-by-one, and placed on top of a bowl of soy sauce ramen. If you break the saury into small pieces and mix it with the soup, the flavor becomes even richer.

Goishi Coast Rest House, one of the places that serve sanma ramen, stocks many local gifts. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor restaurant serves delicious food gathered from the mountains and the sea of Ofunato, including dishes contributing to a healthy, long life, and dishes full of abalone and scallops.

The City Museum, World Camellia Pavilion and Goishi Coast are all close by, so you can enjoy yourself all year round.

#### ☆ Bibliography ☆

- Kesen Carpenters Folklore Museum pamphlet
- Kesen Carpenter Research Center Kenji Hirayama's 「Kesen Carpenter」 Overview
- Iwate Association of Architects & Building Engineers Kesen Branch 「Iwate Kesen Craft Village」 Website (<http://www.epix.co.jp/kesendaiku/takuminosato/index2.html>)

#### 【Editor's note】

This is the first time the charms of the Kesen region are being shown as a historical and cultural tourist destination. Please let us know if you have any comments or suggestions!

Next issue \* \* \*

History of Gold in Kesen Region

Experience Kesen Vol.1

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