

Defining Japan Heritage

Japan Heritage is a story of Japanese culture and traditions told through the historic appeal and characteristics of a region which is recognized by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. The goal is for each region to take initiative, utilize and maintain the various tangible and intangible cultural assets which are imperative to the Japanese story, and strategically transmit information both domestically and internationally to promote the revitalization of each region.

[Discover Japan's national policies implemented in Hokkaido! The Industrial Revolution of the North "Tantetsukou" (coal, steel, port and railway)] was recognized as Japan Heritage in 2019.

Japan Heritage Portal Website
<https://japan-heritage.bunka.go.jp/ja/>



Tantetsukou Story

(The story behind coal mining, iron and railways, and ports)

Modernization of Hokkaido began in the city of Otaru in 1872, when construction of the stone wharf commenced. Following the construction of the port, Otaru became the gateway to Hokkaido, and the opportunity to advance industrially came in 1879, with the opening of the government-operated Horonai Coal Mine (present day Horonai, Mikasa), the first modern coal mine in Hokkaido.

The Horonai Railway, intended to transport coal, was the first railway in Hokkaido, the first link open between Temiya (Otaru) and Sapporo completed in 1880. By 1882, the railway was completed all the way to Horonai. Not only did the Horonai Railway transport coal to the port of Otaru, but it also played a major role in transporting agricultural products and settlers to inland Hokkaido. Smooth transportation of human and material resources led to the development of Sapporo, the capital of Hokkaido.

In 1889, the railway and coal mines were sold to the Hokkaido Colliery and Railway (Hokutan), established by Hori Motoi of the former Satsuma Clan, and by the same company the Sorachi Coal Mine (Utashina) and Yubari Coal Mine (Yubari) were established. Furthermore, the railway was then extended to Muroran in 1892, making Iwamizawa the center of Hokkaido, the hub for railway transportation in all directions of the island, and Muroran the main port for exporting coal.

In 1906, the railway was nationalized. With the money made from the sale, Hokutan merged with two British companies and established the Nippon Steel Corporation in Muroran. In 1909, steelwork operations began (Wanishi Steel Company; present day Japan Steelwork Muroran Steel Company), and Muroran quickly gained its unwavering position as the "city of steel."

On the other hand, the nationalization of the railways ended Hokutan's monopoly on coal transportation, prompting other conglomerates to start their coal mining business in Sorachi region and expand their influence into Sakhalin, which Japan had acquired as a result of the Russo-Japanese War. This facilitated further development of Otaru Port, and led to the closing of the Otaru Canal in 1914.

The railway which now connected Sorachi, Otaru, and Muroran, the three major cities of Hokkaido, became the axis for railway networks throughout the island, while coal mining, shipping ports, and steelwork, the foundation of these three cities paved the way for industrialization in Hokkaido.

Tantetsukou Portal Website
<https://3city.net/>



Tantetsukou Meshi (Food)

A tangible cultural heritage of unique regional culinary diversity captures our stomachs and hearts.

Many unique foods and cultural traditions are associated with the Tantetsukou area. Being able to directly taste such foods and enjoy such cultural traditions makes these a "thing history". So, come taste the foods, walk the streets, participate in various events, and help pass on the story of "Tantetsukou".

Genkan Nabe (hot pot) is a traditional home-cooked dish that has long been enjoyed in Akabira. Pork, beef, and vegetables are served in a miso-based soup. It has become a specialty of Akabira, and many local diners and restaurants.

Ganban Nabe (hot pot) is a specialty of Akabira. It is a hearty dish with a variety of ingredients, including pork, beef, and vegetables, served in a miso-based soup. It has become a specialty of Akabira, and many local diners and restaurants.

Akabira

Muroran Yakitori

Muroran Yakitori is a specialty of Muroran. It is a dish of skewered chicken, beef, and pork, served with a variety of dipping sauces. It has become a specialty of Muroran, and many local diners and restaurants.

Muroran

Otaru

Otaru is a city with a long history of coal mining. It is a city of steel, and many unique foods and cultural traditions are associated with the city. It is a city of steel, and many unique foods and cultural traditions are associated with the city.

Nanako Cuisine

Nanako Cuisine is a specialty of Nanako. It is a dish of small portions of food, served in a variety of styles. It has become a specialty of Nanako, and many local diners and restaurants.

Ashibetsu

Ashibetsu is a city with a long history of coal mining. It is a city of steel, and many unique foods and cultural traditions are associated with the city. It is a city of steel, and many unique foods and cultural traditions are associated with the city.

Catatan

Catatan is a specialty of Catatan. It is a dish of skewered chicken, beef, and pork, served with a variety of dipping sauces. It has become a specialty of Catatan, and many local diners and restaurants.

Yubari Curry Soba

Yubari Curry Soba is a specialty of Yubari. It is a dish of soba noodles with a curry sauce, served with a variety of toppings. It has become a specialty of Yubari, and many local diners and restaurants.

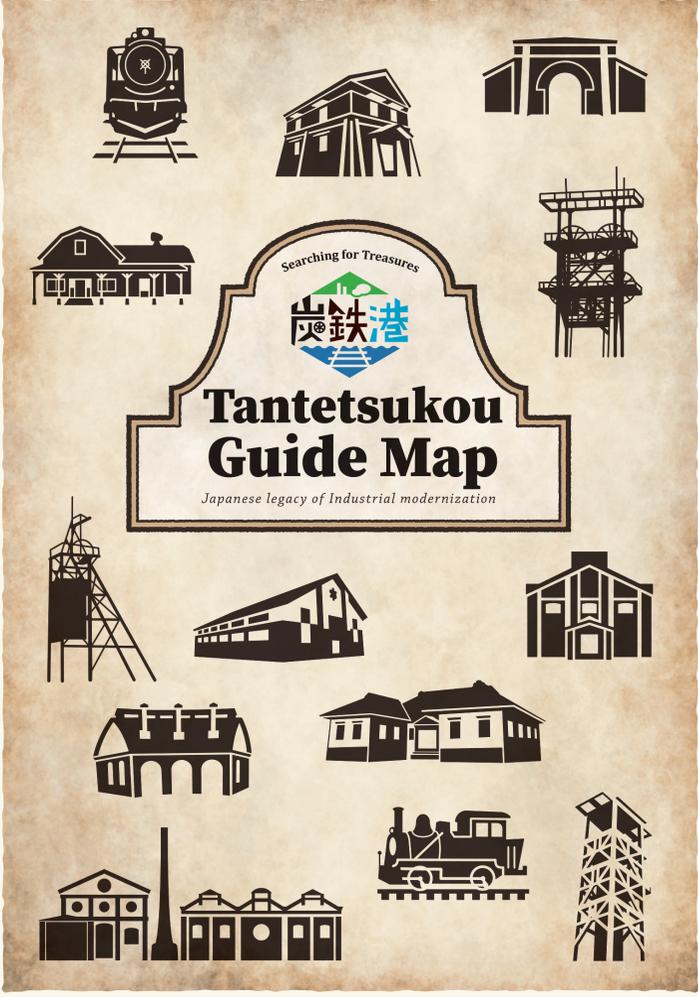
Bibai Yakitori

Bibai Yakitori is a specialty of Bibai. It is a dish of skewered chicken, beef, and pork, served with a variety of dipping sauces. It has become a specialty of Bibai, and many local diners and restaurants.

Tantetsukou Guide Map

Searching for Treasures

Japanese legacy of Industrial modernization



Distance Chart

Approximate distance and travel time between 14 cities and towns that make up the [Tantetsukou] (Tantetsukou). Additional travel time is required to reach each of the 49 Japan Heritage cultural assets. Please confirm details with each facility you wish to visit prior to visiting.

Please be mindful that during the winter season, weather and road conditions can be very poor, leading to recommended that you travel frequently.

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Kamisunagawa Town

In 1887, the Kamisunagawa coal field was discovered. Later in 1899, eight pioneers including Yamauchi Jinnosuke from Uzura Village in Fukui prefecture settled and broke ground here. In 1914, the Mitsui Mining Corporation was founded, marking the beginning of what would become a historical coal mine town. By 1918, the Mitsui Colliery Line had opened between Sunagawa and Kamisunagawa, contributing to an increase in coal production. The town experienced rapid development as Mitsui continued to open up new shafts, constructing power plants, schools, waterworks and hospitals, and the population in Kamisunagawa increased to 20,000. This facilitated a movement to divide the town, and in 1949, a portion of Sunagawa and Utashina were divided to create the town of "Kamisunagawa." The production of coal continued to increase thereafter, the population increasing to 32,103 by 1952. In 1952, in order to promote the rapid progression of the energy transition the coal mine was closed in 1987, putting an end to 73 years of coal mining history. The Mitsui Sunagawa Coal Mine Central Shaft Tower in Kamisunagawa later became the Japan Microgravity Centre which later closed, but still remains today as a symbol of Kamisunagawa. When the Kamisunagawa railway line was closed in 1994, Kamisunagawa Station, which was the stage for a celebration marking the history and culture of coal mining; it is considered a means to increase visitor numbers, and to pass on the unique history and heritage of coal mining to future generations.

Kuriyama Town

The history of Kuriyama dates back to 1888 when Izumi Rintaro from the Kakuta Clan in Miyagi Prefecture settled in the area and established Yubari Reclamation Establishment Cooperative. In 1890, "Kakuta Village" was founded and the Kakuta Village Head Office was established in 1900. The same year, Kobayashi Sake Brewery, which was based in Sapporo, moved its brewery to Kuriyama, rich in natural beauty and abundant water resources, near Yubari where coal mining was beginning to thrive.

In addition to the land reclamation business, the Futamata Coal Mine was opened, propelling development of the area, and in 1926, Hokutan opened the Yubari line (Kuriyama - Shin- Yubari) for the purpose of transporting coal from Yubari. In 1928, the Muroran Line was also completed. In 1930, the Yubari Railway was extended and opened between Nopporo and Kuriyama, making Kuriyama the intersection for two railway lines. As the era moved into Showa (1925-1989), and with the development of Hokkaido Colliery Line, the population exceeded 20,000, leading to the opening of the Kakuta Colliery Line. In 1949, a new town administration was established and the area was named "Kuriyama." The head office was then moved from Yakuta to Kuriyama in 1963.

In 1976, the Kakuta Coal Mine was closed due to decline of the coal industry. Railway transportation of coal dwindled, and in 1975, the Yubari Railway was discontinued. In Kuriyama, agriculture, a key industry of the area, historical landmarks related to industry and business, not to mention sakehouses of Kobayashi Sake Brewery, are all utilized and play an important role in tourism and public interaction.

Tsukigata Town

In 1880, Tsukigata Kiyoshi, from the Fukuoka clan and Secretary of Internal Affairs, came to Hokkaido with a selection committee to choose a site for the prison. On September 3, 1881, the Kabato Shujikan (prison), the third prison in the country, was established for the purpose of detaining those convicted of political crimes and utilizing them for the development of Hokkaido. With the building of the prison came the wardens and their families, increasing locations to handle transportation and supplies.

The wilderness was cultivated into fields by the prisoners, and in 1887, Kabato Prison joined Sorachi Prison (Mikasa) to build the Kamikawa Road (later designated as National Route 12), the Kitami Road that leads to Abashiri, the Kabato Road which connects Kabato and Ichikishiri, as well as the Tesho Road that connects Tsukigata and Mashike, thus the foundation for the development of Hokkaido. In 1919, the Kabato Prison was closed due to a decline in prisoners and criticism surrounding severe accidents and harsh conditions the prisoners faced. Later in 1935, the Sashio line which connected Sapporo and Numata was constructed, and Tsukigata transitioned from a prisoner town to a town of agriculture. As numerous farm communities popped up, shops also increased in number, and agriculture expanded from rice production to flowers and fruits such as melons, watermelons and tomatoes, all of which has shaped agriculture in Tsukigata today. In 1983, when the Nakano Prison in Tokyo closed, the Tsukigata Prison was opened, and once again Tsukigata became the "City of Correction."

Numata Town

The history of coal mining in Numata began in 1873, when Lyman came to investigate the area and developed the foundation for coal mining. Thereafter in 1894, Numata Kisaburo from Numata, Toyama Prefecture, moved 18 families from his hometown to Hokkaido. In 1914, this community separated from Hokuryu Village and was renamed Kami-Hokuryu Village, where the village office was then established. The name was changed to Numata Village in 1922. In 1910, the Rumoi line was constructed by Ministry of Railways for the purpose of transporting coal, timber, and seafood. In 1930, the Meiji Mining Company opened the Showa Coal Mine, and the Asano Uryu Coal Mining Company opened the Asano Coal Mine. The Tankosen (meaning Colliery line) was laid from Ebishima Station to Showa Station within the same town by the Rumoi Railway Company, and in 1961, the Kyushu Mining Company opened the Tachibana coal mine.

However, as the shift from coal to petroleum as an energy source progressed, the Asano coal mine was closed in 1968, and the following year, both the Showa and Tachibana coal mines were closed. With such coal mines closing, the need for the Rumoi Railway Company's business became obsolete and the company eventually dissolved. At its peak in the 1960s, there were approximately 5,000 people living in the Asano district, but with the closing of the Numata Dam, the downtown area was submerged under water. Following the closure of the mines, the town shifted its focus to agriculture, with its focus on rice farming. The "Krauss 15 Steam Locomotive" which was used on the Rumoi line and in the Showa coal mine was preserved as a Designated Cultural Asset of Numata town, and is kept inside a garage near Horoshi Hot Springs. The adjacent Numata Coal Mining Museum showcases the history of each coal mine, playing a role in sharing the town's history both locally and beyond.

Otaru City

The establishment of the Custom Marine in 1869, accelerated the growth of Otaru Port. Merchant ships, which were previously restricted to southern ports of Hokkaido, were now allowed to pass through, and numerous Kitamae merchant ships began to arrive in the Otaru Port from all over Japan.

The designation of Otaru as an export port for coal discovered in Sorachi brought about major developmental changes to Otaru. In 1882, the government-operated Horonai Railway was officially opened, and became a major artery for transporting coal as well as supplies to inland Hokkaido. Otaru Port became the gateway to Hokkaido surpassing Hakodate Port, as more people migrated from Honshu to settle in Hokkaido, and agricultural shipments from the interior increased. A representative cultural asset from this period is the former Temiya Colliery facility, the only Nationally Designated Important Cultural Property of the Tantetsukou. Furthermore, the Otaru Central Market, the first oceanic breakwater in Japan, Otaru was highly praised as a "commercial port on par with Kobe and Yokohama," becoming a hub supporting economic development in Hokkaido, including the Sorachi coal region. The markets where merchants purchased goods to support the livelihood of citizens in post-war Sorachi, opened business near Otaru Station, thus the Otaru Central Market, was founded and continues today; it is the only market still in operation that is recognized as a Japan Heritage site. The movement to preserve historical landmarks, such as the Otaru Canal, has led to the conservation and adaptive reuse of many markets. The movement to preserve historical heritage sites within the city. These remarkable cultural landmarks, such as the footpath created on the ruins of the Horonai Railway, have been preserved and can be experienced in their original form.

Muroran City

In 1873, a year after Muroran Port opened in 1872, the Sapporo Hondo was completed, connecting Hakodate to Mori by land, Mori to Muroran by sea, and Muroran to Sapporo by land again. Following this, in 1892, the railway was opened, in 1894, Muroran Port was designated as a special export port, flourishing as a good natural harbor and key location for shipping coal from the Sorachi area at the end of the 19th Century. Later Muroran made its name as the "steel city" of the early 20th Century when in 1907, the Japan Steel Works, and later in 1909, the Hokkaido Colliery & Steamship Company's Wanshi Iron Works were established. In its prime, Muroran port was the largest coal shipping port, shipping approximately 60 percent of coal produced in Hokkaido to Honshu. Though like many of the other coal-related businesses, the transition from coal to petroleum as an energy source caused business to decline, leading to an end of its use as coal shipping port in 1976. However, Muroran Port continued its operations as a port for shipping goods to the Honshu coast, contributing to the development of Hokkaido's industrial region. Muroran, considered both a "steel city" and a "port city," has contributed to modernization of Hokkaido and Japan through its railways and coal-related industries. In the city, the very large industrial structures of the iron and steel works can be seen, but when one shifts their vantage point just a little, the vast and beautiful natural environment of Muroran can be seen.

In recent years its "Industrial Nightscapes (factories illuminated)," and the use of the area for television series and movie filming has drawn attention to the unique beauty and history of the area. The former Muroran Station, built in 1914, is the oldest timber-structure railway station building in Hokkaido and was designated a Tangible Cultural Property in 1988. Today the history and unique characteristics of Muroran are being utilized to revitalize the city.

Abira Town

Development of the former Owakae Town (present-day Owakae district of Abira Town) began in 1892, when the Hokkaido Colliery and Railway opened between Iwamizawa Station and Muroran Station, and the "Owakae Depot" was established inside the Owakae Station premises, for many years its growth continued as a strategic location for the railway network. Since Owakae was junction for the Muroran Main Line and the Yubari Line (present Sekisho Line), it served as a hub for transporting coal produced in Sorachi and Yubari to Muroran, at its peak over 60 locomotives were stored inside the depot, making it the 5th largest locomotive depot in Hokkaido.

In 1975, the last ST (steam locomotive) in Japan made its final scheduled passenger run between Muroran and Iwamizawa. This was a year a farewell cargo train was operated between Owakae and Yubari. The coal trains were stationed at Owakae Station, and after the trains were retired and disappeared from the national railway system. Drivers who had been assigned to the Owakae Depot were reassigned to Owakae Station in 1992, and were later transferred to the Iwamizawa Depot in 2005, and the Owakae Depot was closed. The role for Owakae as the center for train operations. Later, in 2019, the "Roadside Station Abira (S)" and the "Owakae Railway Museum" opened. The museum displays steam locomotive Class D51 #320, and many other historical railway-related items to the railway industry. The Class D51 #320 locomotive is preserved and maintained by the "Owakae Railway Museum Committee," and is one of the few beautiful engines which remain today in the country. The railway museum in the region is carefully passed onto future generations thanks to the hard work and dedication of the local people.

Ebetsu City

Brick manufacturing in Ebetsu started in 1891, and it is no exaggeration to say that this industry underpinned the development of coal and iron ports in Hokkaido. It went into high gear in 1898, when Hokkaido Colliery and Railway Company (later renamed Hokkaido Colliery and Steamship, both names commonly abbreviated as Hokutan) established a brick factory in Nopporo, Ebetsu Village. Two years later the Tatewaki Brick Factory was established to lead the industry, together with Hokutan, helping Nopporo grow into the leading brick production area in Hokkaido. Such development of the area was the product of several factors. The area was abundant with clay, the raw material for bricks, and had easy access to large, flat sites for setting up borrow pits, drying space, and multiple double-drum kilns more than 40 meters long. It was also in close proximity to firewood and coal supplies, as well as cities like Sapporo and Otaru which made extensive use of bricks. The bricks produced at the Nopporo Brick Factory were distributed to the coal-mining facilities owned by Hokutan, along with other facilities that built the foundation of modern Hokkaido, including the Tomakomai Mill of Oji Paper, Owake Coke Plant, and the Muroran Factory of Japan Steel Works; this allowed the brick factory to solidify its position as a behind-the-scenes force in the coal and iron port business.

Ebetsu is also a city of railways and coal. Yubari Tetsudo, a railway enterprise of Hokkaido Colliery & Steamship, was established to transport coal from the mines managed by the parent company, as well as business commodities. Nopporo Station was the terminal station for the line. As the starting point of Yubari Tetsudo trains, Nopporo Station is an important location in the history of railways and modern industries in Hokkaido. Local volunteers have preserved steam locomotives that once worked hard in the coal mines, and there is a growing momentum to utilize them as cultural tourism resources, handing down the stories of coal and brick industries and the people who shaped the railway history.

Yubari City

History of the "coal mine town, Yubari," began with the arrival of American mining engineer Benjamin Smith Lyman and his research team in 1874, when they inspected the coal fields on the upstream stretch of the Yubari River. Later, in 1888, Hokkaido government led by the Honorary Chamberlain San Ichitaro discovered a massive coal outcrop upstream of the Shihoro-Cabato River. With the opening of the Yubari Coal Mine by Hokkaido Colliery and Railway (Hokutan) in 1892, the city began to flourish as a coal mining town, with related industries, particularly iron and steel, and Mitsubishi, also developing.

By 1960, Yubari had grown into a city with a population exceeding 11,000. However, in the late 1950s, as energy demand shifted from coal to petroleum, coal mines began closing one after another. When Mitsubishi Coal Mining Company's Minami Oyubari Coal Mine closed in 1936, the history of Yubari as a coal mining town came to an end. After that, Yubari had a long period from the coal mining industry to tourism.

The "Sekitan no Rekishi Mura" (Coal History Village) theme park was built on former coal mining land, and Yubari also has a museum opened in 1980, utilizing the remaining coal mining heritage. In 2007, Yubari was designated as a municipality for local reconstruction. However, after completion of renovations to the Coal Mine Museum in 2018, the facility reopened as a museum for learning about the town, people, and coal industry, ensuring that the coal mine heritage remains a regional treasure to nurture and transmit to the area, as well as an opportunity to increase nonresident population.

Iwamizawa City

With the opening of the government-owned Horonai Railway between Horonai and Temiya on November 13, 1882, came the development of Iwamizawa between 1884, and 1885. The railway was completed between Iwamizawa and Utashina in 1891, and between Iwamizawa and Wanishi (Muroran) in the following year, making it a strategic hub for land transportation. In 1905, the then Kurisawa Village (present day Iwamizawa City, Kurisawa-cho) the Manji coal mine was opened, necessitating the opening of all Manji railways lines in 1914, to transport coal along the railway. The Miruto coal mine was opened in 1918, and with production of coal in full swing, at the Asahi coal mine, the Asahi Station was completed in 1919, forcing both the coal and railway in the area to develop rapidly.

Even the switchyard that was completed in 1926, and averaged 1,617 cars a day was capable of handling up to 4,800 cars a day with massive construction that took place in 1953 - 1957, and with the extension of the railway between Sibiru and Iwamizawa which took place between 1959 and 1962, the switchyard underwent renovations for the second time, increasing its capability to handling 3,000 cars a day, marking the growth and increase in transport of coal and supplies. However, as the coal mining industry declined, the use of the railway also declined. The Iwamizawa train station, a symbol of a railway town, was constructed with embossed bricks and old ties, which has won a "Good Design" award for its architectural design fit for a railway town. While the coal mining industry has declined, the expectation is that the excellent transportation network and city function will be utilized to its full potential as a central city in Sorachi, creating new history in the region.

Bibai City

Enomoto Takeaki of the Hokkaido Development Commissioner, who was put in charge of the coal mines, submitted the "Coal Mining Investigation Report" in 1873, which facilitated development of the Horonai coal mine. The next year in 1874, American coal mining engineer and geologist Lyman inspected the Bibai coal field and introduced the "Geological Sketch Map of the Island of Yesso, Japan (1876)," which led to the search for the Bibai coal field mining lot. In 1889, tokuta Kosaburo inspected the upstream stretches of the Bibai River for coal seams. Small-scale coal mining began late in the Meiji era in eastern and southern Bibai districts, and by Taiho and Showa, large corporations such as Mitsubishi and Mitsui had begun large-scale projects to dig for coal. The development of the coal industry brought more settlers to the area, resulting town organization in 1925, and the area became Yamakata town (renamed Bibai the following year). Bibai became the 15th city in Hokkaido. Transportation of large amounts of coal became a priority, leading to the construction of the Mitsubishi-Bibai Railway, Mitsubishi-Chashina Railway, and Mitsui-Bibai national Minami Bibai line. However, as the coal industry dwindled in the 1960s, the Mitsui Bibai coal mine closed in 1963, and the Mitsubishi Bibai coal mine closed in 1976, which then led to the closure of the Bibai Railway. The following year in 1973, the Hokkaido coal mine closed, which meant that every coal shaft and mine in Bibai was closed. In 1990, long after its closure, the Mitsubishi Bibai Coal Mine pit tower (upper and lower) were donated to the city and are now exhibited in the Coal Mine Memorial Forest Park. Furthermore, the Arte Piazza (Bibai) Art Museum was changed to Yashiro Kan Sculptural Art Gallery Arte Piazza in 2016, an art and cultural exchange center displaying artwork of Bibai sculptor Yasuhiro, was constructed in near the former Sakae Elementary School on the east side of Bibai district in 1994, serving as an important resource for tourism today.

Ashibetsu City

Development of Ashibetsu began in 1893. Coal mining started in 1897, and with the opening of the railway between Takikawa and Furano in 1913, Mitsubishi Mining (corporation) began full-scale operations, gradually expanding its coal mining activities. In 1938, the Takane Mining opened a shaft, and the following year the Mitsui Mining (corporation) opened its first coal shaft. This led to the opening of the Mitsui Mining Ashibetsu Colliery Railway in 1940, for the purpose of transporting coal. In 1944, the Meiji Mining Company acquired the East Ashibetsu Coal Mine and began operations there. In 1947, the Yuya coal mine, and five other major corporations known as the "Ashibetsu Five Mines" opened up numerous shafts, the population reaching a whopping 75,000 in 1959, shaping the "Coal-mining town of Ashibetsu." However, during the 1960s, the transition from coal to petroleum led to the closure of many coal mines, and in 1992, the Mitsui Ashibetsu Coal Mine closed, marking the end of underground coal mining in Ashibetsu.

Difficult conditions for key industries forced the city to find means of revitalization by inviting companies to move to Ashibetsu, and through the development of tourist attractions. In recent years the former Seisa Elementary School has been the venue for various events. An observation deck and a parking area of the former Mitsui Ashibetsu Colliery Railway Tanzan Bridge has been maintained for visitors. Each of these, along with the heritage of coal mining in the beautiful natural landscapes, and specialty products are appealing, expectant to become important tourism resources.

Akabira City

Coal mining history in Akabira began in 1857, when Matsuura Takeshiro, who is known for naming Hokkaido, discovered coal on the shores of the Sorachi River. As there was no way to transport the coal at that time, development was stagnant. Later, in 1913, when the railway was completed between Takikawa and Sumitomo, many coal mines began to open. The Moshiri Coal Mine, the first large coal mine in Akabira, was opened in 1918, followed by the Toyosato Coal Mine in 1937, and both the Akama and Sumitomo Akabira Coal Mines in 1938, which were among the major coal mines. The total number of coal mines in Akabira was 20, and large-scale coal mines in Akabira alone.

While many coal mines were in operation, the population increased, making Akabira the 18th largest city in 1954. In 1960, the population peaked at 59,430, and the amount of cargo passing through Akabira Station one year surpassed that of Umeda Station in Osaka, making it the highest location in Japan at the time, symbolizing the development of the region. However, in the early 1950s, the coal mining industry began to decline, and in 1994, the last coal mine closed, signaling the end of "coal mining history" in Akabira. Akabira then began to transition from a coal mining city, to an industrial city, proactively utilizing skills and knowledge acquired through mining to revive manufacturing companies in the area. Amidst such endeavor, the 6th International Mining History Congress was held in 2003, creating an opportunity to preserve the coal mining heritage. In 2016, the former Sumitomo Akabira Coal Mine facility changed hands from Sumitomo Materals to the City of Akabira by grant transfer, and the Akabira Coal Mine Heritage Guidance Facility intended to pass on the history of coal mining in Akabira opened in 2018.

Mikasa City

Following the discovery of coal in Horonai in 1868, the Horonai coal mine, a government-operated coal mine, was established. In 1882, the Sorachi Shujikan (present prison) was built in Ichikishi for the purpose of developing Hokkaido and securing laborers to work the coal mines. The same year the first railway in Hokkaido was completed between Horonai and Temiya (Otaru) to haul coal dug from the Horonai coal mines.

The opening of Ikushunetsu and Ponnetsu as well as other coal mines accelerated the development of machinery to dig coal, and by the Showa era large quantities of coal were being transported. In contrast with the rapid development, the population in Mikasa also increased, and by 1959, the population reached 92,000. However, influenced due to changes in energy policies, and major accidents in the mines caused by the coal mine to close in 1957, Ponnetsu mine in 1971, and the Horonai coal mine in 1989.

In 1987, the Mikasa Railway Memorial Museum was opened to utilize the coal heritage left behind. In 1994, the Crawford Park, which housed the remains of the Horonai Station, was constructed. These have become key players in sharing the story of the coal mining heritage of Mikasa, and in 2018, the park was expanded to the Mikasa Geopark. Revitalization of the town is being promoted through tours that incorporate the interesting history and utilize the coal mining heritage based on the geopark for the purpose of entertaining both locals and tourists.