



History of Minamata-City



Geography of Minamata City

Located in southwest Kyushu, in the southernmost tip of Kumamoto Prefecture, Minamata City adjoins the cities of Izumi and Okuchi in Kagoshima Prefecture. Surrounded by mountains and rolling hills on three sides, the city straddles the mouth of the Minamata river where it opens into the sea. The climate is warm and the city covers an area of 162.88 square kilometers.

Richly vegetated mountains occupy a large proportion of the city's area, and hamlets are scattered along the river's length. Seventy percent of the city's population resides in its urban areas, and most stores and businesses are located there. The coastal regions facing the Shiranui Sea (Yatsushiro Sea) are littered with inlets and there are also many fishing ports. The beautiful Rias coastline stretches along the northern coast. National Highway 268 traverses the city East-West, while National Highway 3 and the JR Kagoshima line run from North to South. The opening of Kyushu Shinkansen made it possible to access Yatsushiro in 14 minutes and Kagoshima in 32 minutes. In addition, Hisatsu Orange Railroad runs between Yatsushiro in Kumamoto Prefecture and Sendai in Kagoshima Prefecture.

Development of Minamata City

Minamata village came into being in 1889, during the Meiji period, with the introduction of the cities, towns and villages system. Although the village produced salt on the tidal flats, with only 2,325 homes and a population of 12,040, Minamata was no more than a small farming and fishing village. Nippon Nitrogen Fertilizer Corporation, the predecessor of Chisso Corporation, was established in 1908. Thereafter, Minamata developed in parallel with the company's growth.

Minamata was designated a town in 1912, when a railroad connection and other infrastructure were laid down. Emerging from the devastation of war, Minamata became a city in 1949, and took an important step toward modernity. The population reached a peak of 50,461 persons in 1956, when the city boundaries were redrawn to encompass Kugino village. Minamata City took on the aspect of one of only a handful of modern, industrial cities in Kumamoto Prefecture.

Exhausted by the outbreak of Minamata disease, the effect of the accelerated urban drift associated with high economic growth, and the subsequent decline of the regional economy, by September 2007, the population had also declined to 28,901 persons.

Thanks to the implementation of redevelopment schemes and the realization of a national government financial support scheme, Chisso Corp. made an improvement in business situation. The promotion of industries including recycling companies, electric appliance manufacture, a plywood factory, is also progressing.

Now overcoming the problems brought by Minamata disease, the City of Minamata, despite its size, is promoting an Environmental Model City in order to construct a resource circulation society while aiming at a warm and comfortable environmentally conscious city.

