



Cultural Landscape Design for Hidden Cristian Site

## PROJECT TITLE

Cultural Landscape Design for Hidden Christian Sites

## PROJECT STATEMENT

Around 450 years ago, Christianity was introduced to the Sakitsu and Imatomi areas of Amakusa in Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. The Christian faith persevered in secret here, even during periods when Christianity was prohibited. In 2012, the fishing village of Sakitsu and the farming village of Imatomi were selected as Important Cultural Landscapes in Japan. In 2018, Sakitsu became a World Heritage Site as part of the Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region site group. In preparation for this, the city of Amakusa established a Cultural Landscape Improvement Management Committee in 2010 composed of academic experts and local resident representatives with the task of deliberating on all public works in the area. The important elements of the project presented here include: A) the implementation of a comprehensive design that protects and enhances the value of the community across a wide range of commercial, architectural, and civil engineering disciplines; B) the creation of, over 10 years of cooperation with the locals, a sustainable system that both protects important cultural assets without impeding on the unique lifestyle of the local community; and C) the continuous interdisciplinary management of the cultural landscape by local residents, local government officials, experts, and private businesses.

## PROJECT NARRATIVE

### 1. Background of the Project

Lying on the northern shore of Yokaku Bay, the Sakitsu district of Amakusa City, Kumamoto Prefecture, is a fishing village with a population of around 500 residents. The Imatomi district is a neighboring inland community built upon agriculture and forestry. These districts were registered as Important Cultural Landscapes of Japan in 2012. Out of recognition for its history as a place where Christianity was practiced in harmony with traditional Japanese religion and society during periods when Christianity was outlawed, the village of Sakitsu was registered as a component of the Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region World Heritage Site in 2018. Such recognition has brought dramatic change to the villages of Sakitsu and Imatomi over the past decade. In order for the local landscapes to persist into the future, there was a need for public projects to help protect and develop them. The World Heritage designation especially was expected to lead to a significant increase to tourism, necessitating development to take advantage of this increase, e.g., promoting village-wide tourism, while also implementing measures to prevent overtourism.

## 2. Process and Results

The reason we were able to design and implement these public projects continuously since 2010 was due not only to the continuous efforts of residents, community representatives, and designers, but also thanks to the local government, which created and maintained the Amakusa City Cultural Landscape Improvement Management Committee (“Landscape Committee”). Even before the area was registered as an Important Cultural Landscape of Japan and a World Heritage site, the local government made it so that the Landscape Committee deliberated on almost all public works projects, regardless of whether they originated in national, prefectural, or municipal government entities. The committee consists of a well-balanced yet varied group of experts involved in the design of public works including: leading academics in landscape engineering, landscape architecture, and community development; local architects with a deep knowledge of the architecture of the Amakusa region; and local residents representing the community. For over 10 years, the committee has been involved in the design and management of almost all public works projects regardless of purpose or scale. The committee has handled projects dealing with concepts for the overall future of the region, disaster prevention projects such as storm surge, erosion, and flood control, and projects to develop and convey the appeal of the area (e.g., a “roadside station” [local produce market], a plaza, an information center, and signage).

As a result of its designation as a World Heritage Site and ongoing landscape development, the number of tourists visiting Sakiatsu/Imatomi has quadrupled in the last 10 years, with approximately 150,000 people visiting in 2018. Sakitsu has thankfully progressed, however, from a place where visitors would park in the middle of Sakitsu, see the church, then leave. The main parking lot, along with the roadside station, is now located on the outer edge of the village and acts as a place where visitors can obtain sightseeing information and learn the local rules before walking around the village. The area also features a plaza, an information center, and restrooms, thereby increasing the amount of time tourists spend in the area and expanding the scope of their activities.

## 3. Comprehensive Design

Proper design of public works projects is usually only considered for heavily trafficked facilities or facilities that are integral for a specific tourist destination. In this respect, Sakitsu is unique in that its Landscape Committee helped design and manage almost all public works projects, regardless of scope or size. The 14 projects covered can be broadly classified into the categories of disaster prevention, tourism, townscape preservation, utilization of vacant land, and beautification.



Sakitsu needed a simple, understated design that would balance the local area's landscape as a fishing village (the first fishing village in Japan to be selected as a national Important Cultural Landscape), its farming and mountain village landscape, and its World Heritage landscape that preserves the culture of the hidden Christians. This design needed to protect, promote, and utilize the strengths of each of these landscapes. Gradual implementation of this design in public projects resulted in a strengthening of the overall landscape.

While respecting the historical landscape, emphasis was placed on sustainable design that would mitigate changes to the landscape made by public projects. The types of design for this overall project cover a wide range of areas, including signs, fences, buildings, plazas, storm surge protection, and afforestation. Construction was done with commonly available materials and minimal ornamentation to ensure that the facilities could be sustainably maintained into the future. A book was also made in 2020 that provided an overview of all past maintenance to make sure that the thought processes behind the design components are available as reference.

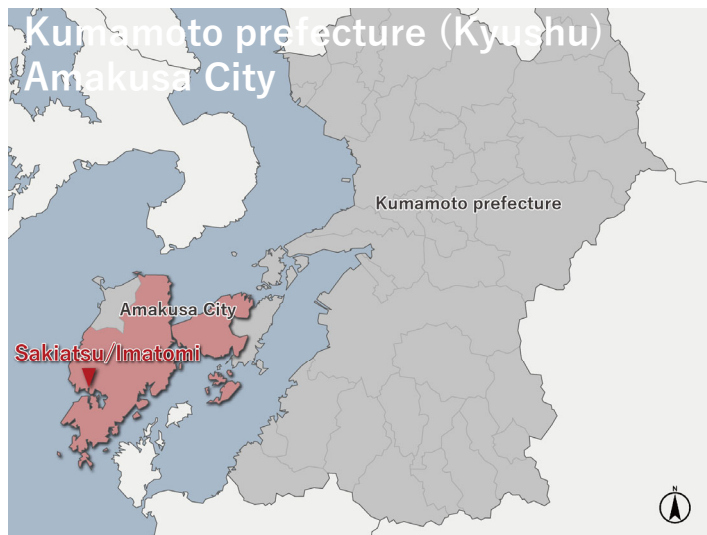
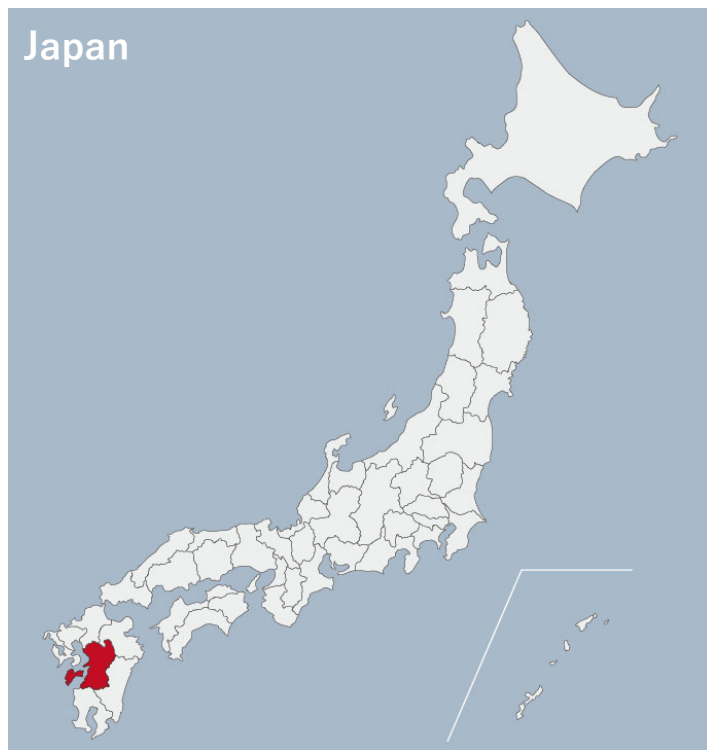
Although all public works projects should implement landscape design principles, many challenges exist in order for this to be successfully achieved. Although this project was done in consideration of the Important Cultural Landscape and World Heritage programs, the methods implemented here offer one example of how comprehensive landscape design can be accomplished.

#### **4. Collaboration with Local Residents**

When this series of projects began, local residents were not necessarily open to the idea of Sakitsu becoming a World Heritage site, with one main reason being the fear that a rapid influx of tourists that would change living conditions in the community. The heads of local community groups (who were also members of the Landscape Committee) knew all of the local residents and actively listened to their concerns, and then provided detailed, realistic opinions to the committee. The ideas of the local residents helped the committee continue to function as a forum for seeking designs that everyone could agree on. The committee continues to meet two to three times each year, and 2023 marks the 13th year of its inception. In addition to its design work, the committee also created the Tomitsu Lab, a center for collaboration with the local community halfway between Sakiatsu and Imatomi, to hear local opinions on the creation of footpaths and other activities, thereby contributing to the development of a sustainable community.

The residents have gradually become more aware of the value of where they live and seem to have a heightened awareness of the need to protect and develop it. The local fishing cooperative funded the construction of a store selling local fish and other marine produce. More homeowners are landscaping their yards. Volunteers care for flower beds in the plaza. There used to be nowhere to eat—now, it's hard to decide from the many options available. Small but significant changes are evident everywhere. Sakitsu is regaining its vitality.

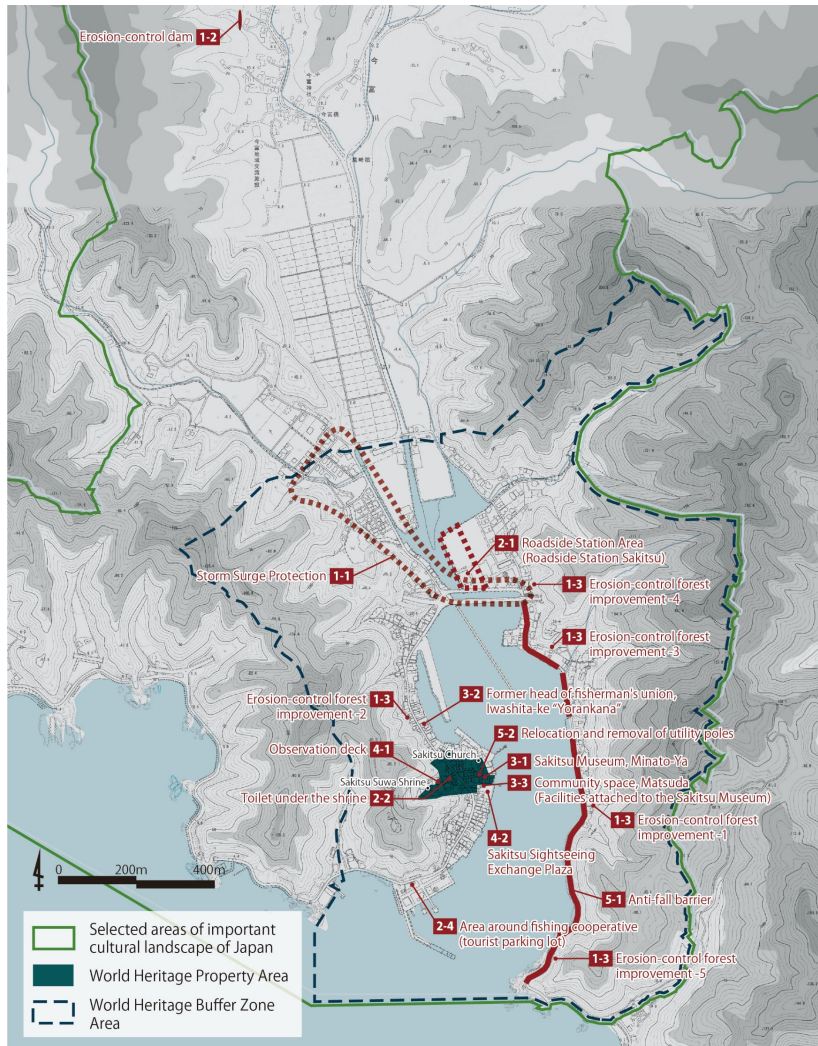




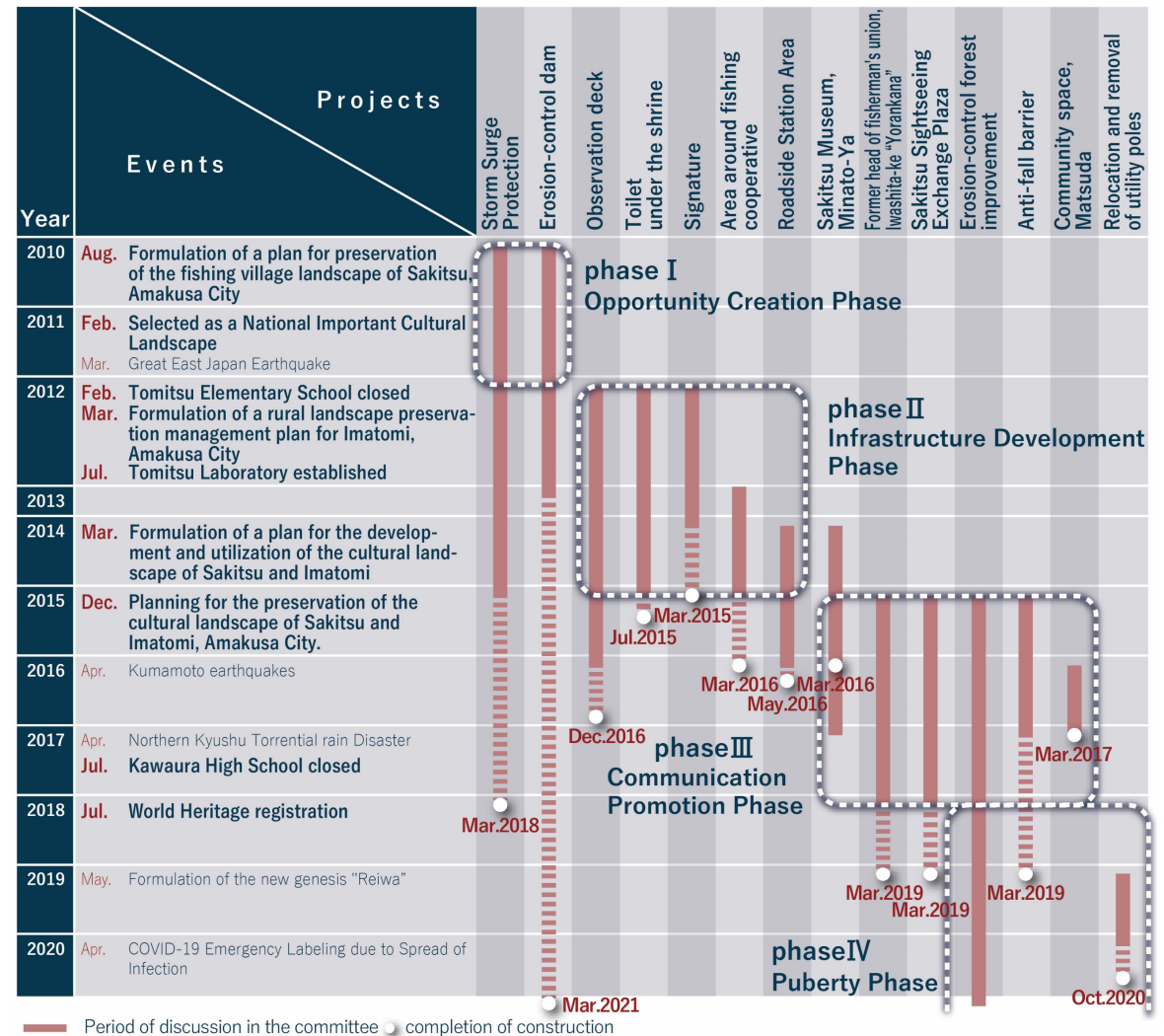
The design of the two districts was required from multiple perspectives, including disaster countermeasures, tourism, townscape, vacant land use, and landscape improvement. Both areas required design from multiple perspectives, including disaster countermeasures, tourism, streetscape, use of vacant land, and landscaping.



## location map



## chronology



This project was launched in earnest in 2010 to protect and nurture the landscape of Sakitsu and Imatomi. The project is still ongoing. Fourteen projects have been completed to date, covering the range of Important Cultural Landscapes.

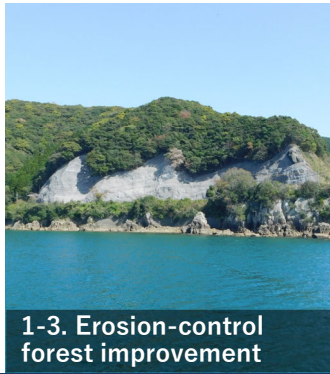




1-1. Storm Surge Protection



1-2.Erosion-control dam



1-3. Erosion-control forest improvement

## 1.Disaster Prevention



3-1.Sakitsu Museum, Minato-Ya



3-2.Former head of fisherman's union, Iwashita-ke "Yorankana"



3-3.Community space, Matsuda (Facilities attached to the Sakitsu Museum)

## 3.Townscape preservation



2-1.Roadside Station Area (Roadside Station Sakitsu)



2-2.Toilet under the shrine



4-1.Observation deck



4-2.Sakitsu Sightseeing Exchange Plaza

## 4. Utilization of vacant land



2-3.Signature (Approximately 30 units in the district)



2-4.Area around fishing cooperative (Tourist parking lot)

## 2.Tourism



5-1.Anti-fall barrier



5-2.Relocation and removal of utility poles

## 5. Beautification

## 01 Comprehensive Design

We have designed all public works projects in the Sakiatsu/Imatomi area. The designs cover a wide range of areas, including "Disaster Prevention", "Tourism", "Townscape preservation", "Utilization of vacant land", and "Beautification".





**Workshops with residents**



**Study using the model**



**On-site review of committees**



**Guided tours by local residents**



**Guided tour by local high school students**



**Local residents and Students Collaboration in Creating "Kake"**



**Residents' handmade bamboo planters**



**Footpath activity in Imatomi area**



**Workshop with local children**

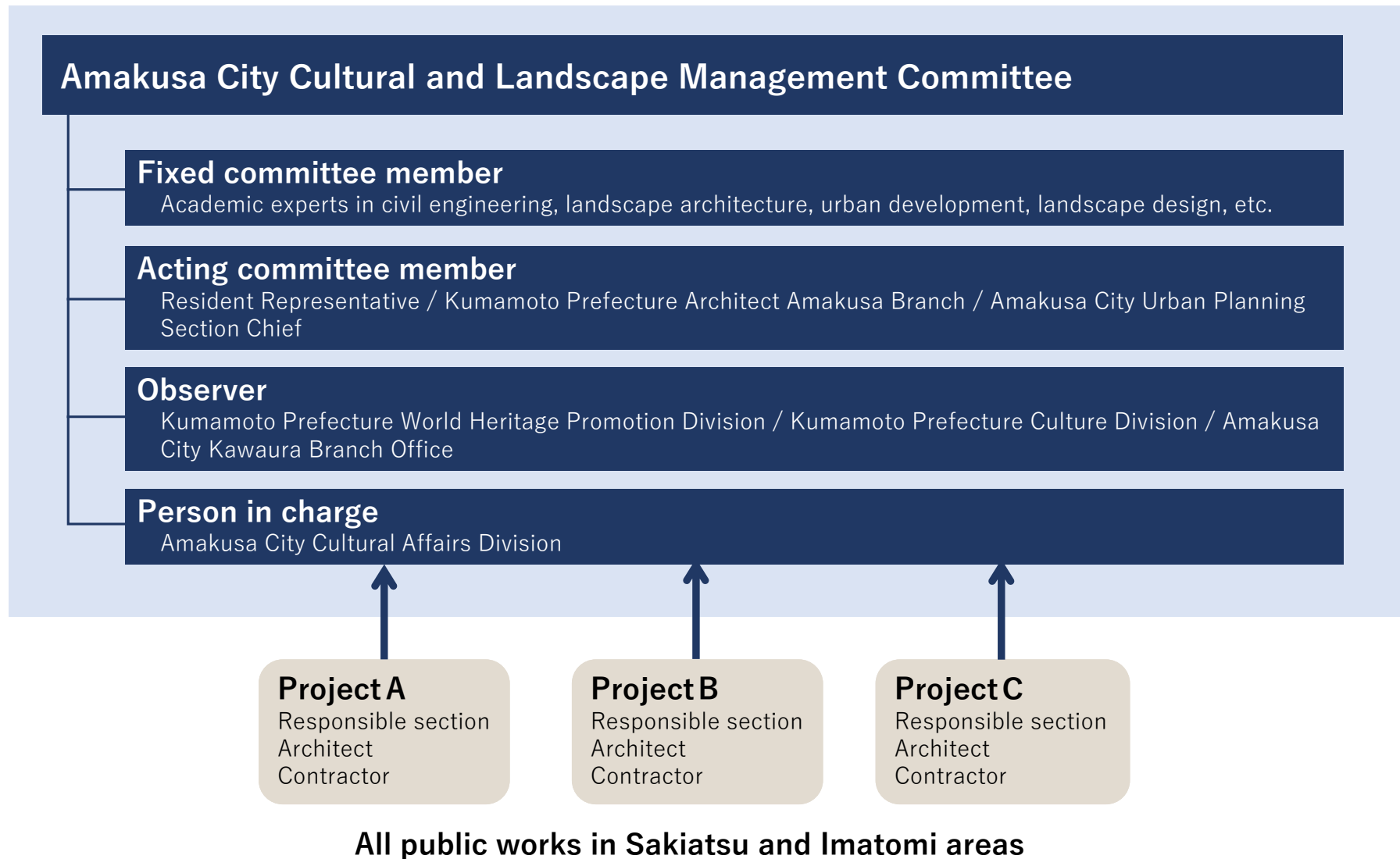


**Community study at the closed Tomitsu Elementary**

## 02 Design for Sustainability

The company has continued to engage in discussions with local residents to design the project. The company has also continued activities to help residents rediscover the charms of Sakiatsu and Imatomi.

## Policy making, design management organization



### 03 Design for Autonomy

The "Amakusa City Cultural Landscape Development Management Committee" was formed as the framework of this project, with academic experts, residents, and government officials as core members, and managed the design of all public works.



## Storm Surge Protection

Plans executed



## Erosion-control dam



## Erosion-control forest improvement

After



Initial plan



Before



## 04-1 Disaster Prevention

In order to protect the livelihood of the community, storm surge countermeasures, erosion control measures, and slope collapse countermeasures were implemented. In storm surge countermeasures, we aimed to minimize the impact on the landscape while ensuring safety.



**Roadside Station Area (Roadside Station Sakitsu)**



**Toilet under the shrine**



**Signature (Approximately 30 units in the district)**



**Area around fishing cooperative (Tourist parking lot)**



## 04-2 Tourism

We designed a facility that balances the convenience of the rapidly increasing number of tourists due to the registration as a World Heritage site with the livelihood of the local community.



## Sakitsu Museum, Minato-Ya

Before



After



### 04-3 Townscape preservation

Three vacant houses were renovated to create a guidance facility.

One of them, the Minatoya, was renovated while retaining the history of the original building, and the second floor offers a rest area with a view of the Sakitsu Church.



**Observation deck**



**Sakitsu Sightseeing Exchange Plaza**



#### **04-4 Utilization of vacant land**

We used a vacant lot to develop two small squares.

We tried to maximize the charm of each place, such as the topography with a view of the church and the connection with the sea.



## Relocation and removal of utility poles



### 04-5 Beautification

Electric poles were relocated and removed in the vicinity of Sakitsu Church to create a landscape unobstructed by poles and wires from the road. Fences along the seashore were made in consideration of the view of the sea.