

# Saiku Historical Museum Introduction



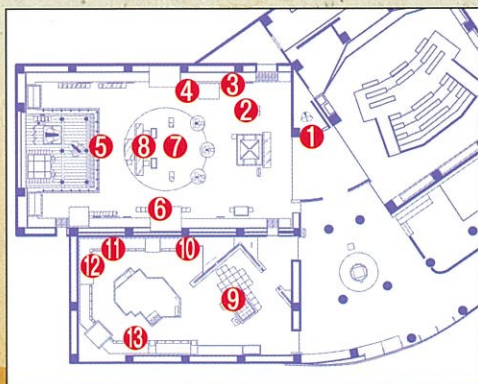
平成28年度 文化庁  
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Agency for Cultural Affairs  
Government of Japan



## Welcome to the Saiku Historical Museum

“Saiku” refers to the residential palace and office of the Saio, an unmarried female member of the imperial family appointed to serve Ise Jingu shrine complex. This museum conducts research into the Saiku based on archaeological excavations and documents, and makes its findings available to the public. Long since abandoned, the palace and office of the Saio now lie in ruins under the ground. The Saiku Historical Museum actually stands on a corner of the vast archaeological site of the Saiku.







## 1 Saio offering prayers

The woman with her back to us is the Saio, shown here offering prayers to a *kami* (deity).

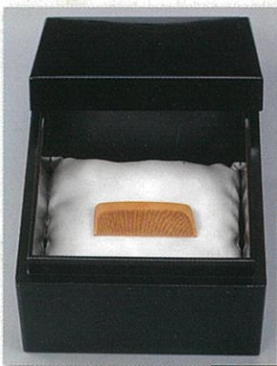
A new Saio was appointed each time a new emperor came to the throne. When the emperor abdicated or passed away, the Saio retired.

The Saio system is thought to have originated in the second half of the seventh century. The Saio system lasted until the first half of the 14th century, resulting in the appointments of over 60 Saio over a period of about 660 years.

## 2 Appointment of the Saio

The *Engishiki* is a legal compendium compiled in the 10th century. The *Engishiki* prescribed that a new Saio be chosen when a new emperor was enthroned. Divination was used to select the Saio from among the unmarried female members of the imperial family. The divination was carried out by heating tortoise shells, and then reading the divine will in the resulting cracks.

The newly appointed Saio spent an entire year secluded from the secular world in a room within the imperial palace. She then moved to a temporary palace built on the outskirts of the capital, where she spent another year isolated from the secular world. Her subsequent relocation to Ise, where the Saiku was situated, usually took place two or three years after her appointment.



## 3 Departure ceremony

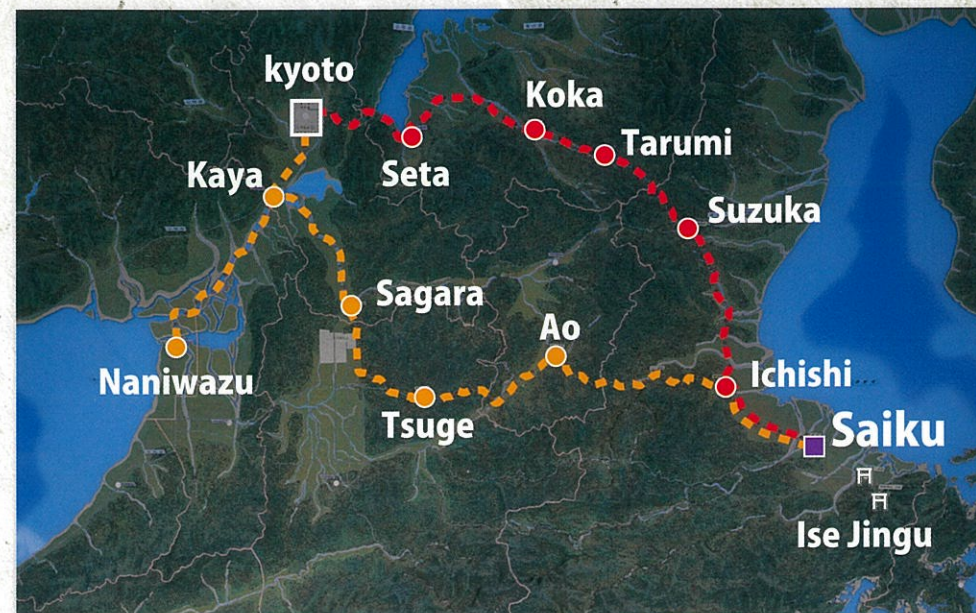
On the day of her departure to Ise, the Saio performed *misogi* (purification ritual) in a river in the western part of Kyoto, which was the capital beginning in the 8th century. After the *misogi*, she went to the imperial palace for a departure ceremony.

The departure ceremony was performed by the emperor himself, who placed a boxwood comb in the Saio's hair above the forehead, and told her never to look back at the capital. This comb was called the "farewell comb."

The comb and box on display are reconstructions based on descriptions in an early 12th century document.



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## 4 The Saio's procession

The Saio and her retinue of several hundred travelled the roughly 130 km distance from Kyoto to Ise in five nights and six days. The procession, called the Saio Gunko, was an important state event.

This diorama shows the procession route in red.

A life-size reconstruction of the *sokaren*, a type of palanquin used by the Saio on her trip to Ise, is displayed at the entrance of the exhibition hall.

Once she had departed to Ise, the Saio was recalled back to the capital only when the emperor abdicated, or passed away. Although the length of appointment naturally differed from one person to the next, the longest serving Saio is recorded to have spent 30 years at the Saiku. The Saio took the route shown in red back to the capital when the emperor abdicated. She took the route shown in yellow when the emperor died.



3





## 5 Living quarters of the Saio

This life-size display recreates the lifestyle of a Saio living at the Saiku sometime around the 11th century. The Saio is seated at the back of the room. In front of her is the Myobu, the Saio's first lady-in-waiting. Although the Saio's duty was to serve the *kami* (deities), her day-to-day life was not very different from that of most court nobles and imperial family members living in the capital. Both the Saio and her Myobu are wearing multi-layered robes called *juni-hitoe*, the formal attire of female courtiers.



## 6 Saio and Ise Jingu's annual rituals

The Saio's most important duty was to attend three of Ise Jingu's annual ceremonies.

Its three annual ceremonies; in particular the Tsukinami-sai held in June and December, and Kanname-sai held in September, were important state events held to pray for the peace of the entire country. To prepare herself for them, the Saio performed *misogi* (purifying ritual) at the sea or river on the last day of the month preceding the ceremony. After the purifying ritual, the Saio stayed at a building called Rikyuin, located close to Ise Jingu in order to attend the aforementioned ceremonies, which took place at Geku and Naiku, Ise Jingu's two major shrines.



## 7 The world of courtly literature

The literature of the Heian period (late 8th to 12th centuries) contains valuable information about politics, society, and the lifestyles of the aristocracy. The Saiku and Saio often appear as subject matter, offering clues about how the Saiku was regarded by contemporary people. *Ise monogatari* (*The Tales of Ise*) and *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) are two literary works where the Saio play important roles.

## 8 Illustrated Handscroll of

*Ise monogatari* (*The Tales of Ise*) is considered a leading example of an *uta monogatari*, or "poem tale," a narrative composed mainly of *waka* poems. *Ise monogatari* recounts the numerous love affairs of the protagonist, a handsome aristocrat thought to be modeled on Ariwara no Narihira (825 – 880). The author and date is unknown, but most of it is believed to have been written around the 10th century. Among the 125 tales recorded in the *Ise monogatari* is "Kari no Tsukai" (The Imperial Huntsman), an episode describing a liaison between the protagonist and a Saio set at the Saiku.

The reproduction on display shows the "Kari no Tsukai" segment of the handscroll.



2 The Saio visits the protagonist's chamber



1 The protagonist visits the Saiku



4 The protagonist, who failed to meet the Saio as promised due to the banquet, receives a poem from the Saio



3 A banquet is held for the protagonist on the night of the promised rendezvous



## 10 Sheep-shaped inkstone

This inkstone is thought to date from the mid-8th century. An inkstone nearly identical in shape has also been retrieved from Nara, which was the capital at the time. Only a handful of examples of this type of inkstone are known in the country.



## 9 Reduced-scale reconstruction of the Saikuryo

The Saiku in the Heian period (late 8th to 12th centuries) had roads laid out on a grid plan, which divided the Saiku into blocks containing the palace and office buildings.

Two adjoining blocks running east-west in the center of the Saiku were called the Naiin, which was the location of the Saio's residential palace. The building where the Saio normally resided was surrounded by double fences. Thin pieces of hinoki cypress bark layered on top of each other were used for the roofing material of this and other important buildings. It is believed that in addition to the Naiin, the Saiku had blocks hosting the various departments of the Saikuryo. The northern blocks of the Saiku had storehouses.

This model is based on archaeological evidence as well as inferences drawn from them, because many parts of the site still remain unexcavated. Excavation of the Saiku site is ongoing, and has brought to light information not available when this model was created.

The Saiku site today is part of a residential area where many people live. Although it is difficult to imagine it, still lying underneath the houses and railroad tracks are the remains of the Saiku, an ancient palace and office complex.



## 11 Green-glazed ceramic bowl with incised floral patterns

Ceramic vessels coated with glazes that fire to green hues were luxury items produced in emulation of Chinese celadon porcelain. Green-glazed ceramic wares incised with floral patterns seem to have been favored as the most luxurious type of domestically-produced ceramic ware, and examples have been found both in capital cities and locations hosting provincial governments. The design motif of this bowl is thought to be a flower of the Buddhist paradise. It is one of the rare Buddhist-related artifacts found at the site of the Saiku.



## 12 Development of the culture of writing

Compared to earlier periods, a greater numbers of excavated examples of earthenware vessels bearing ink inscriptions dating from the 9th century onward have been found.

The inscriptions are commonly the names of government offices, or characters considered auspicious. Earthenware dating from the 10th century onward occasionally bears inscriptions in the Japanese *hiragana* syllabary. Earthenware inscribed with *hiragana* is more frequently found within the blocks of the Saiku called the Naiin, where the living quarters of the Saio were. These *hiragana* inscriptions may have been written by women serving the Saio, because in ancient court society *hiragana* was used mainly by women.



## 13 Imported ceramics

Between the 9th and 11th centuries, the types of ceramic ware valued the most in Japan were celadon porcelain and white porcelain imported from China and the Korean Peninsula. Celadon and white porcelain were especially prized by the aristocracy. The quantity of imported ceramic ware unearthed from the Saiku site is exceptionally large compared to other parts of the country, with the exception of Kyoto, the location of the capital, and Hakata in Fukuoka Prefecture, where a major trading port was situated. This indicates that these costly ceramic vessels were used by the Saio and her exclusive circle, who brought to the Saiku the privileged lifestyle of the capital.







## Saiku Heian Era Park

This park for the historic site was created in the block of the Saiku where there was an important facility used for ceremonies and banquets by the chief officer or head of the Saikuryo, the government office responsible for the running of the Saiku. It is one of the many rectangular blocks created in the eastern part of the Saiku during and after the second half of the 8th century.

Built within the park are three life-size reconstructions of buildings dating from around the early 9th century.



## Itsukinomiya Hall for Historical Experience

The Itsukinomiya Hall for Historical Experience is located north of the Kintetsu Saiku Station in the Saiku site. The hall building is modeled after an aristocratic residence in the Heian period (late 8th to 12th centuries). This facility provides visitors with an experience of Heian-period culture, one of the important origins of Japanese culture.



## The 1:10 scale model of the Saiku site

The entire Saiku historical site measures 2 km east to west, and 0.7 km north to south. It is a vast site covering an area of 137 hectares. At this park, the site is recreated in 1:10 scale to provide a succinct idea of the site. In this model, each block is represented by an area of raised ground, with buildings reconstructed for some of the central blocks.

## Notes

- Food and beverages are NOT allowed (except in the café and snack section).
- Photography is allowed (except in the designated "No Photography" area; Flash is NOT permitted.)
- NO pets allowed.
- NO smoking. (Use the designated outdoor smoking area.)

## Visitor information

Hours	9:30 to 17:30 (admission until 16:30)
Closed	Mondays (except public holidays) Day after a public holiday (except Saturdays and Sundays) December 29 to January 3

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