



# KYOTO IMPERIAL PALACE



The Kyoto Imperial Palace (Kyoto Gosho) was the residence of the Japanese emperors until 1869, when the capital was moved to Tokyo during the Meiji Restoration. The history of the Kyoto Imperial Palace can be traced back to the late 8th century, when Emperor Kanmu moved the capital from Heijō-kyō (Nara) to Nagaoka-kyō in 784, and then to Heian-kyō (Kyoto) in 794.

The boundaries of the ancient capital city of Heian-kyō formed a rectangle measuring 5.2 km from north to south and 4.5 km from east to west. The emperor's residential inner palace (*dairi*) was located inside the greater palace (*daidairi*), a large, walled complex that included the ceremonial buildings, government offices and the inner palace. When the inner palace was damaged or destroyed by fire, the mansions of the aristocracy would provide temporary accommodation for the emperor, as a temporary Imperial palace (*sato-dairi*).



The site of the present Kyoto Imperial Palace was originally one of these temporary residences, called Tsuchimikado Higashinotōin-dono. This site has served as the permanent Imperial Palace for over 500 years, since Emperor Kōgon was enthroned here in 1331, until the capital moved to Tokyo in 1869. During those 500 years, the palace was plagued by fire and was reconstructed several times. The present structures were reconstructed in 1855. This palace was not only home to Emperor Kōmei (1831-1867) and his successor, Meiji, but also the stage for such important historical events during the Meiji Restoration.

The present Kyoto Imperial Palace is a rectangle measuring 450m from north to south and 250m from east to west, surrounded by an earthen wall, covering an area of 11 hectares.



## Shishinden (Hall for State Ceremonies)

The Shishinden is the most important building in the Kyoto Imperial Palace. The most important state ceremonies such as the enthronement of the emperor were held here. The current building dates from 1855 and revived the building style of the Heian Period (794-1185), in order to accommodate ancient ceremonies. The Charter Oath, a five-article statement outlining the aims of the reign of Emperor Meiji, was promulgated from this building in 1868. This Oath can be regarded as the first constitution of modern



Japan. The present building was used for the enthronements of the Emperors Meiji (1868), Taishō (1915), and Shōwa (1928). The southern courtyard, enclosed by colonnades, was also important as a place to hold ceremonies. Viewed from the vantage of the throne, the Shishinden's central staircase is flanked to the left by a "left cherry tree" and to the right by a "right mandarin orange tree".

## The Emperor's Throne and the Empress' Throne

The throne standing in the center of the Shishinden is the emperor's throne (*takamikura*), with the empress' throne (*michōdai*) standing to the right. These thrones are used especially during the enthronement ceremony of a new emperor. The present thrones were made in 1913 and were used in the enthronement ceremonies of Emperors Taishō, Shōwa, and His Majesty the Emperor. When His Majesty the Emperor was enthroned, these two thrones were transported from Kyoto to the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.



The emperor's throne itself stands on a black lacquered platform surrounded by red-lacquered balustrades, under an octagonal canopy supported by eight columns. There is one large and eight small phoenixes adorning the canopy. The phoenix is an Imperial symbol. The empress' throne is a very similar structure to that of the emperor, but is about ten percent smaller in size.

## Kenreimon (Gate)



Kenreimon Gate is the south-facing main gate of the Kyoto Imperial Palace. It was used for important rituals held in the Shishinden such as the enthronement ceremony.

## Okurumayose (Carriage Porch)



This carriage porch was reserved for the exclusive use of high ranking courtiers when they attended court rituals or had an audience with the emperor.

## Shodaibu-no-ma (Waiting Rooms)



The three rooms of the Shodaibu-no-ma served as waiting rooms, with visitors allocated to one of the rooms according to their ranks. In descending order of importance, these are the “Room of the Tigers,” the “Room of the Cranes,” and the “Room of the Cherry Blossoms”, named after the paintings that adorn the sliding doors of each of the rooms. Differences in status are also expressed in the use of different colored tatami mat edgings. Visitors who were to use the “Room of the Tigers” or the “Room of the Cranes” were allowed to use the Carriage Porch, while those using the “Room of the Cherry Blossoms” entered the room directly from outside using the stepping stone located to the left of the building.

## Shinmikurumayose (New Carriage Porch)



This carriage porch was newly built in 1915 for Emperor Taishō (1879-1926) to make an entrance and exit on a carriage when the emperor’s enthronement ceremony was held in the Shishinden. The carriage porch faces south, following the tradition of emperor’s entering and exiting from the south side of the *Kyoto Imperial Palace*.



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## Seiryōden (Hall for Rites and Rituals)

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The Seiryōden was the living quarters of the emperor starting from the 10th century. Important religious observances and political affairs were also conducted here. After the construction of the Otsunegoten imperial residential quarters in 1590, the Seiryōden was used almost exclusively for rites and rituals.



In order to stage traditional rituals, the mid-Heian period architectural form and the interiors adhere to more ancient rules.

The thick tatami mat placed in the center of the building is where the emperor was seated (*hinoomashi*).

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## Kogoshō (Palace for Ceremonies and Imperial Audiences)

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The Kogoshō was built during the Kamakura period (1185-1333), and was used in the Edo period (1603-1868) to hold ceremonies and for imperial audiences with members of the governing samurai class (*buke*). This building is famous as the place where discussions were held on how to deal with the Tokugawa Shōgun in 1868 during the Meiji Restoration. The building is divided into three rooms each higher than the next, surrounded by a wide wooden corridor, making the Kogoshō a very practical building capable of accommodating many different ceremonies. The current Kogoshō was rebuilt in 1958 after it burnt down in 1954.

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## Oikeniwa (Garden)

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The Oikeniwa Garden is a strolling garden, and has a large pond.

On the right side of the garden, you can see the wooden zelkova bridge (*keyakibashi bridge*).



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## Ogakumonjo (Palace for Study and Other Ceremonies)

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The Ogakumonjo was separated from the Seiryōden in 1613. This building was used to hold academic events such as the “First Reading Ceremony” for the crown prince (*odokusbo hajime*) and waka poetry gatherings, as well as for imperial audiences. In 1867, Emperor Meiji met here with the Imperial princes and his retainers, and issued the “Decree for the Restoration of Imperial Rule,” a pivotal event in the Meiji Restoration. The interior is divided into 6 rooms, including an upper, middle and lower room, all covered with tatami mats.



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## Otsunegoten (Imperial Residential Palace)

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The living quarters of the emperor, the Otsunegoten was originally located inside the Seiryōden, but was removed to a separate building in 1590. As well as being the living quarters of the emperor, there are three rooms on the south-side of the building, the upper, middle, and lower rooms, which were used for rituals and imperial audiences. The building consists in total of fifteen rooms, including the imperial sleeping chamber and the room where the Sacred Sword and the Jade (two of the Three Imperial Regalia of Japan) were kept.



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## Gonaitei (Garden)

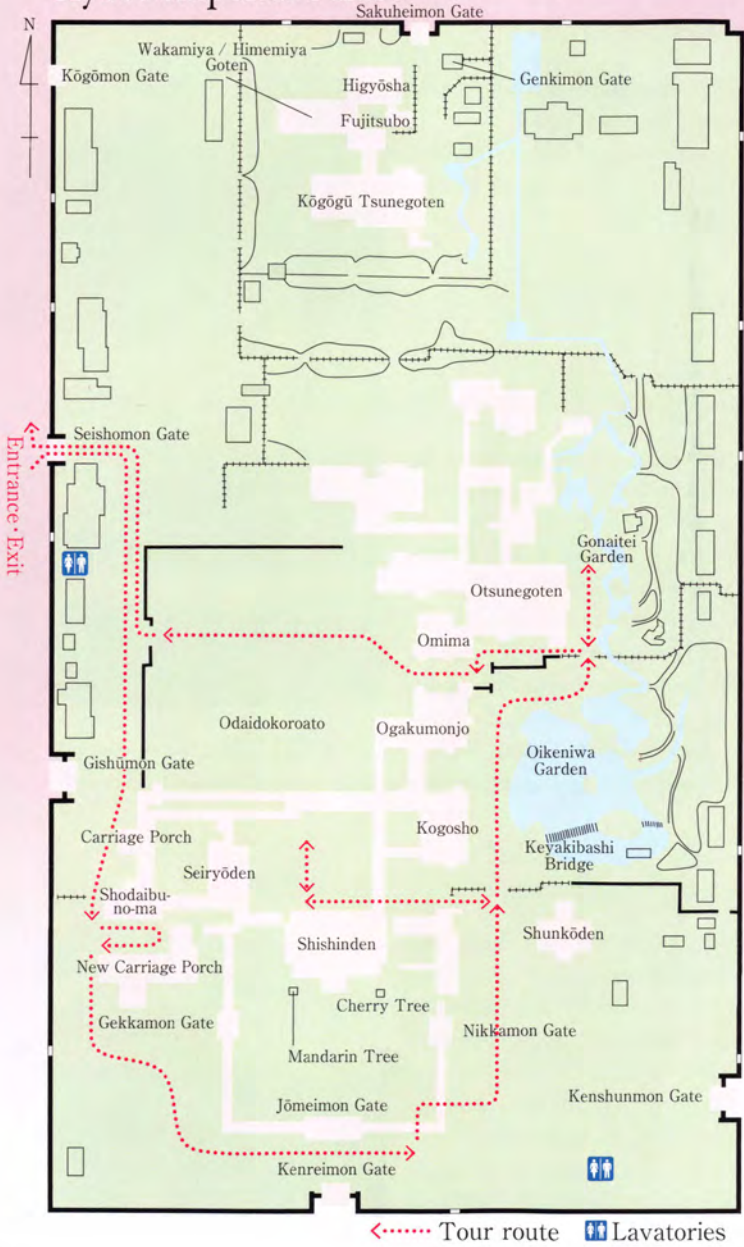
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This elegant garden was exquisitely designed with the meandering stream spanned by earthen and stone bridges as well as lanterns and stones.





# Kyoto Imperial Palace

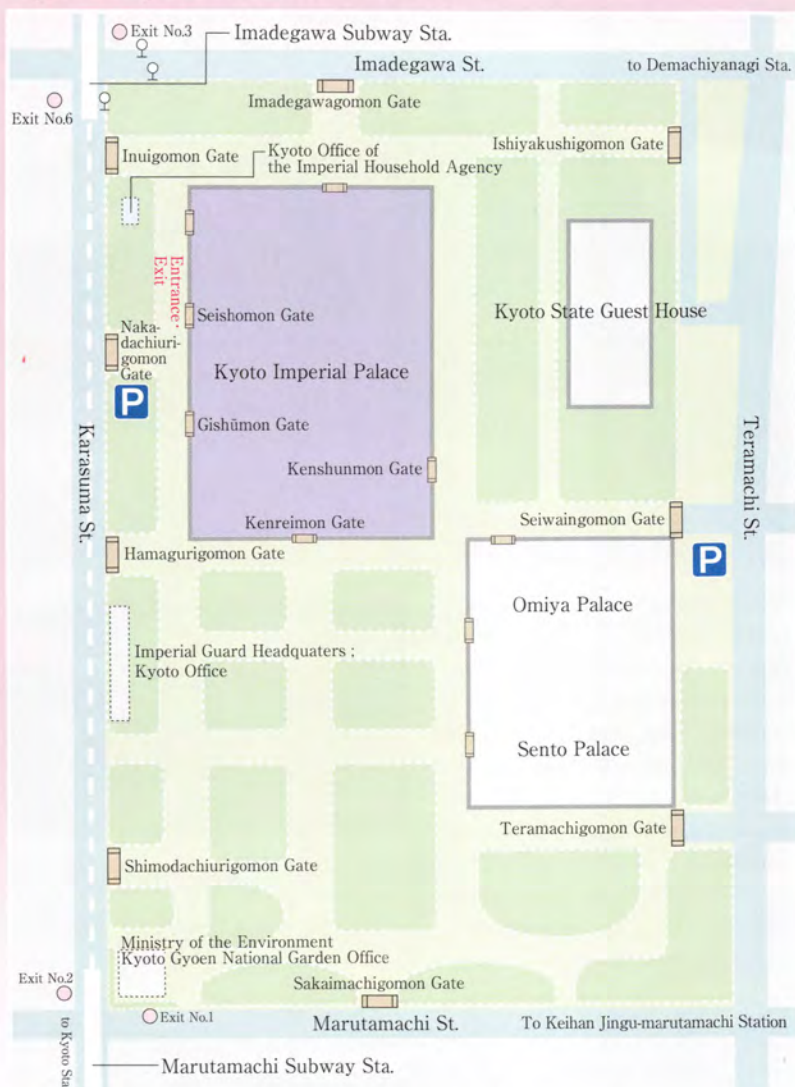


**Odaidokoroato**  
**Cherry Blossoms**



**Oikeniwa Garden**  
**Snow Scene**

# Kyoto Gyoen National Garden



## 【Access to the Kyoto Imperial Palace by public transport】

(Karasuma Line, Kyoto City Subway) 5 minutes from Imadegawa Station

(Kyoto City Bus) 5 minutes from Karasuma-Imadegawa bus stop

The free audio guide app for the Kyoto Imperial Palace Guide is available.



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