

Tsumago Secondary Inn (*Waki-honjin*)

An Inn and Brewery

The Tsumago secondary inn has two front doors: the one used as the entrance today was the door for the Hayashi family, who managed the inn, and for their sake-brewing business. What is now the ticket office was formerly a storeroom for barrels of sake. The desk on the raised tatami-covered floor by the central window was where the head clerk would sit, keeping a watchful eye on incoming and outgoing goods. The staff of the sake brewery lived on the second floor above where he sat.

***Irori* Hearth**

To the right of the entrance is the *irori no ma*, or hearth, on the raised wooden floor. Status determined where the different members of the family would sit around the hearth. The all-powerful father sat on the far side, where smoke and drafts were least prevalent. He even had a block of wood set on the ashes of the hearth where he could warm his feet. Guests would sit to the father's left, with their backs facing the street, while the women of the house would sit on his right.

There was a subtle distinction in how the women were treated: while the grandmother could sit on the soft, warm tatami, the wife had to be content with the hard, cold wooden floor. But it was the children who had the worst of it: they sat just above the packed-earth floor, closest to the door and most exposed to drafts and smoke. From this they were supposed to learn two things: patience (*gaman*) and respect (*sonkei*) for their elders and betters.

Soot-Blackened *Hinoki* Cypress

As the hearth had no chimney, most of the smoke it generated would stay in the house. This kept the house dry and prevented the wood from rotting. It also meant that the pale *hinoki* cypress of which the house was made grew darker over time as it accumulated an ever-thicker patina of soot. One of the tasks of the women of the house was to polish the wooden walls using little sacks full of naturally oily rice husks. Look closely and you will see that the walls are shiny up to about 2 meters from the ground, and dull beyond that, where the women's polishing efforts did not reach. Unlike most woods, *hinoki* actually gets stronger as it ages. It lasts around 1,000 years, hitting the peak of its strength at around the 800-year mark. This building, in other words, will achieve peak robustness in the year 2677, and will not need to be rebuilt until 2877!

An Imperial Visitor

As was typical for most primary and secondary inns, the Hayashi family lived on the left-hand side of the building (as seen from the street), while guests were accommodated on the right. Note the *shachihoko*, or mythical fish creatures, at either end of its roof. They were supposed to ward off fires because of their association with water. Because fish have no eyelids and are therefore on "permanent alert," they were also thought to ward off evil in general.

The Tsumago secondary inn played host to one extremely important visitor on June 28, 1880, when Emperor Meiji dropped in for a brief rest. The emperor entered via the ornate gate that opens onto the garden and used the rooms at the back right of the house.

Most palanquins are designed so the traveler inside is at a lower level than the porters, but this would be unacceptable for the emperor, who was then considered divine. Instead, Emperor Meiji was carried in a special palanquin that resembled a portable shrine, with his entire body lifted higher than the shoulders of the porters who were carrying him. He was dressed in a French military uniform, and—presumably to display his commitment to the national drive toward modernization and Westernization—he marched directly across a red carpet and into the house without removing his riding boots. He then sat down on a folding chair and enjoyed a cup of green tea. The owner at the time wrote an inscription commemorating the event on the underside of the tea table. (As a side note, this table was built without the use of nails, because the act of striking a nail could be associated with violence against the emperor.)

Because the emperor only stayed long enough for tea, he did not make use of the magnificent bath meant for the use of overnight guests. A noteworthy feature of this space is the elegant umbrella ceiling (*karakasa tenjo*), which is designed to channel drops of condensation to the edge so that they do not drip on the bather's head.

A Family Museum

At the back of the secondary inn is a small museum containing everyday items belonging to the Hayashi family, along with a model of the original 1679 building. Of interest to literary scholars are the many letters, postcards, and first editions of Shimazaki Toson (1872–1943), a renowned author who was related to the family that managed the Tsumago primary inn. Shimazaki's childhood sweetheart married into the Hayashi family, and the two of them kept in touch even as his fame grew and he moved as far away as Paris. Shimazaki's historical novel *Before the Dawn* (1929–1935), which describes the social upheavals in Kiso as the collapsing shogunate made way for the emperor system, is a Japanese classic.

After the new national road and railway line down the valley opened in 1892 and 1909, respectively, the Nakasendo was no longer a convenient travel route and its inns no longer a necessity for travelers. Paradoxically, it was probably this very lack of guests that saved Tsumago generally and the *waki-honjin* from demolition and rebuilding.

One final important fact about the *waki-honjin*: It was at the *irori* hearth in this house that the first-ever meeting to discuss the preservation and restoration of Tsumago was held in 1967.