

When Emperor Meiji Visited Shichiken

In 1880, the Emperor Meiji took a tour through the prefectures of Kyoto, Mie, and Yamanashi. Since Shichiken was built along the Koshu Kaido, one of Japan's three major highways in the Edo period (1603–1867), it was a prime location for the emperor's visit, and it was arranged that the emperor would stay at Shichiken for one night.

The accommodations for the emperor during an imperial visit, called an Anzaisho, were prepared by Kitahara Nobuyo, the 6th generation owner of Shichiken. The Yamanashi government supervised the construction of a bath, and a Western-style bed was brought in.

Imperial Visit

Emperor Meiji arrived at Shichiken on June 22, 1880 traveling with 300 guards, all of whom also stayed in Daigahara-Juku. The emperor and his inner circle stayed at the Anzaisho built by Kitahara. The majority of his entourage stayed at various inns in the area while performing their duties attending the emperor.

During the Meiji era, the emperor was still thought of as a god. Only Kitahara and his two children were permitted an audience. As a token of gratitude for Kitahara's hospitality, the emperor gave the family two bolts of white silk and 50 yen as a gift. Back in 1880, 50 yen was the equivalent of approximately 1,000,000 yen (\$10,000 USD) today.

After the emperor left, many residents around Shichiken lined up to receive a portion of the bath water the emperor had used the night before. It is even rumored that some people drank the water, believing it had some special power.

The Anzaisho

The Anzaisho was constructed entirely of wood, sourced mainly from Wakayama Prefecture. These days, most of Japan's timber is imported from the United States, Canada, and Southeast Asia.

After the emperor departed through the Anzaisho front gate in 1880, it has not been opened again. In accordance with Japanese custom, no one has been permitted to stay in the chambers once occupied by the emperor. The Anzaisho at Shichiken

is now a museum. Among the items on display are the chopsticks the emperor used during his stay, and the original fanlight window frames presented to Shichiken by the daimyo of Takato domain for the building in 1835, from which the brewery earned its name.

The Anzaisho is preserved as a cultural asset at the request of the Ministry of Education. The building has also been designated as a cultural heritage site by the Yamanashi government.