

Former Kaneko Residence

The Kaneko family were wealthy merchants who held great influence as town headmen of Mitarai, particularly during the final years of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). They built this residence in 1823 as a place to entertain their many illustrious guests, among them writers, artists, and political figures. The building was designated a Tangible Cultural Property by the city of Kure in 2011 and renovated between 2014 and 2018. It is now open for use by the public.

The Former Kaneko Residence contains several small, tatami-floored rooms that look out on a traditional Japanese tea garden and an attached tearoom with an adjacent *mizuya* (kitchenette). The tearoom and *mizuya* were constructed in Kyoto in 1823. After being disassembled for transport, they were brought to Mitarai by ship and reassembled at the residence.

Attendees of a tea ceremony first rinse their hands and mouth at the stone basin in the garden, then walk across the stepping-stones, pass through the inner gate, and enter the tearoom through the low, square *nijiriguchi* door. This door forces all guests to bow low when entering the tearoom, symbolizing the equality of all participants. The Kaneko family, wanting to express special reverence for their more esteemed guests, built a second, slightly taller entrance that connects the tearoom directly to the external corridor running alongside the garden. Such a feature is rarely seen in teahouses. When the teahouse is used today, guests are able to enter from either of the two entrances.

Because of Mitarai's pivotal location along the sea routes connecting Hiroshima, Chōshū, and Satsuma domain, the Kaneko Residence was the site of important political meetings, most notably the arrangement of the Mitarai Treaty. In September of 1867, the three daimyo who controlled these domains formed an alliance against the shogunate in Edo (now Tokyo). Two months later, on November 26, Hiroshima's militia commander, Kishikyū Be'e, and Chōshū's chief retainer, Mōri Takumi, met at the Kaneko Residence to finalize their allegiance and draft a concrete strategy for dispatching troops to Edo, where they would topple the shogunate and restore the emperor as sovereign ruler. That same night, warships departed from Mitarai heading for Edo. The agreement between Be'e and Takumi would later be known as the Mitarai Treaty. The signatories to the treaty were ultimately successful in their endeavor, and the restoration of the emperor's authority was announced on January 3, 1868, marking the beginning of the Meiji era (1868–1912).