

Rokken-jaya Tea Houses Site

The Rokken-jaya Tea Houses were a place for travelers to rest on journeys between the old provinces of Suo and Nagato in the Choshu domain (modern-day Yamaguchi Prefecture). There were six farmhouses at Rokken-jaya (which means, literally, six tea houses), and they were the only houses for several miles on either side of the steep Itado mountain pass. The residents of these farmhouses accommodated travelers with a place to rest and served them refreshments.

In the early seventeenth century, the rulers of the Choshu domain, the Mori family, developed a highway between their residence at Hagi Castle, on the Sea of Japan coast, to Mitajiri, a port town on the Seto Inland Sea coast. The highway, known as the Hagi Okan, was used for transport and trade and by the lords of Choshu for their journeys to the capital Edo (modern-day Tokyo). From 1635, the lords spent alternate years in the capital as part of the practice of alternate attendance (*sankinkotai*) enforced by the Tokugawa shogunate. They traveled with their retainers in vast processions along the Hagi Okan to fulfill this obligation.

The Rokken-jaya became a designated rest area (*okagotateba*) for the lord and his entourage on journeys to and from Edo. There were six of these between Hagi and Mitajiri, and facilities were constructed for the lord and his highest-ranking retainers at each site. At the Rokken-jaya site, there is a partial reconstruction of a building used by the lord. In front of the entrance is a small, roofed structure with space to store two palanquins, or *kago*. The lord was carried in one of the palanquins by four to six bearers. The second palanquin was a spare.

The lord's entourage numbered around 1,000 members and included retainers, bodyguards, and servants. They carried many heavy items such as chests packed with clothes and other necessities. Historical records indicate that a large iron plate the size of a futon mattress was among the heaviest items transported. It is thought that this was placed under the lord's bedding to guard against attacks from beneath the flooring while he slept.