

The Meiji Restoration and the Choshu Domain

Daimyo, samurai, and anti-shogunate activists from the Choshu domain (modern-day Yamaguchi Prefecture) were instrumental in bringing about the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This historic event marked the end of rule under the Tokugawa shogunate and the restoration of sovereign power to the emperor. Significant political reforms took place in the years following the Restoration, and Japan began a process of modernization under the new Meiji government. Visitors can learn about this defining chapter of Japanese history and the influential figures that helped usher in the new era at sites throughout the city of Yamaguchi.

The Bakumatsu History Museum (also known as Jippotei Ishin Museum) explains the history of the Choshu domain and the events that set the domain on its path against the shogunate, from economic downturn and famine to wars with foreign powers and alliances with other powerful anti-shogunate domains. Displays include maps of key battles, detailed timelines, and video projection exhibits. There are also profiles of figures central to the politics of the era such as Mori Takachika (1819–1871), the thirteenth daimyo of the domain, and the Choshu Five, activists supporting the restoration of rule under the emperor who went on to shape the Meiji government. The museum is built on the site of a former soy sauce brewery, and its grounds contain historical buildings including Jippotei, an accommodation for Choshu officials in use in the 1860s.

Imperial loyalists gathered secretly at venues such as Jippotei to strategize and form alliances. An outbuilding known as Chinryutei has been preserved on the grounds of Kozan Park. The building was owned by a merchant family and is famous as the site of covert meetings between loyalists from the Choshu and Satsuma (modern-day Kagoshima Prefecture) domains. Through their meetings at Chinryutei, the loyalists resolved to form an army and rise up against the shogunate. Another known clandestine meeting spot is Rosando, a tea house built by daimyo Mori Takachika, relocated from its original location to the grounds of Kozan Park.

The Bakumatsu History Museum has maps that include the main imperial loyalist-related sites in the city. Visitors taking part in guided walking tours of the historic Hagi Okan highway can customize their itinerary to include Meiji Restoration-related sites. These tours are available through the Hagi Okan Storytellers Association (Hagi Okan Kataribe no Kai).