

Hyakurokuri-tei and Chokan-tei: Pocket Park and Viewing Platform

Located more or less at the geographic center of Seki Juku, Hyakurokuri-tei is a small park named for the town's distance from the Tokaido road terminus at Nihonbashi in Edo: 106 *ri* (*hyakurokuri*, equivalent to 424 kilometers). The old house that once stood here has been demolished to create a space where visitors can sit and rest, eat a packed lunch, or just get out of the sun or rain. (The park also serves an important practical purpose as a firebreak.) The highlight of the park is Chokan-tei, a building with a small viewing terrace on the second floor that affords fantastic views above the roofline in both directions – west toward the mountains and Kyoto, and east toward Tokyo.

The buildings in post-station towns tend to be on the low side because it was considered improper for ordinary citizens to be able to look down on daimyo lords as they proceeded to and from Edo. Most of the houses in Seki Juku have “insect-cage windows” (*mushikomado*) on the second floor, which provide a very limited view straight ahead through closely spaced bars. The bird's-eye vista afforded by the viewing platform is one that Seki's Edo-period inhabitants never got to enjoy.

The view westward of the steep roof of Seki Jizoin Temple, Seki Juku's tallest building, is striking. Although the temple itself was first built in 741, the current structure dates from 1700. The mountain ridge beyond is the natural boundary between eastern and western Japan that made Seki the ideal site for the Suzuka Barrier (*Suzuza no Seki*), a fortified checkpoint to guard the region around the imperial capital that lies beyond. The barrier, which was constructed in the Nara period (710–794), gave Seki Juku its name.