

Sekijuku Hatago Tamaya Historical Museum

This grand old inn, now a museum, is easy to spot thanks to the circular window with flame-motif plasterwork in the center of the second floor. Originally twice the size it is today, the inn extended into the grounds of what is now the post office next door. As one of the three biggest inns in Seki Juku, Tamaya could accommodate as many as 200 guests at a time. Since shogunate law forbade travelers on the Tokaido from sleeping outside, operating an inn along the route was a guaranteed moneymaker.

In the front room on the ground floor, several wooden boards are displayed just above the foot of the staircase. These are *kofuda*, signboards of the *ko*, or village groups, that pooled funds and sent one or more members on the pilgrimage to Ise Grand Shrine as their representatives. The majority of the inn's rooms were *aibeya*, large sleeping spaces shared by strangers or by members of the same *ko*.

The large kitchen on the eastern side of the ground floor has soot-stained walls, a packed-earth floor (now cemented over), and a ceiling that rises to 12 meters at its highest point. It also has a traditional cookstove (which still works), flasks for sake and vinegar, and, just outside, a well and a stone trough for washing. Note also the bathing tub in a little room just off the kitchen.

The back side of the flame window is visible from the upstairs. (Typically, one would not want any flame motifs near a wooden building, but this flame symbolizes good luck and prosperity.) The original futon and tableware set out in the tatami rooms give an idea of what the inn would have looked like when in operation.

The annex at the back, which is separated from the main building by a small garden, was where the most important guests stayed. The floors and ceilings here are significantly higher, the walls are a vivid shade of yellow, and the transoms (*ranma*) between the rooms are carved with traditional auspicious motifs such as cranes and turtles, rabbits and waves, and pine, plum, and bamboo. Behind the annex is another, larger inner garden with raked gravel, a stone lantern, and some quite substantial trees. Since none of Seki Juku's primary or secondary inns are open to visitors, this is the best place to get an idea of how important visitors were accommodated when they passed through the town.

Beyond the annex is the *kura* storehouse. The ground floor houses a small museum of ukiyo-e prints, including a 12-panel work by Utagawa Yoshitora (1836–1880) showing all the famous spots on the Tokaido road from Kyoto (on the left) to Edo (on the right). The rather lurid red coloring tells us that it dates from the early Meiji era (1868–1912), when Japanese printmakers began using imported synthetic pigments. The other ukiyo-e on display depict typical scenes from other station towns along the Tokaido road.

Displays on the second floor include old black-and-white photographs of the inns of Seki Juku, old signboards from inns and shops, and a fusuma sliding door from Tamaya repaired with pages from the inn's register.

The Sekijuku Hatago Tamaya Historical Museum is open from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Tuesday through Sunday. There is a discount for purchasing a joint entry ticket to these three museums: the Sekijuku Hatago Tamaya Historical Museum, the Seki Machinami Museum, and the Seki no Yama Kaikan.