

Treasures of the Imperial Family: Sannomaru Shozokan

Opened in 1993, the Museum of the Imperial Collections Sannomaru Shozokan contains thousands of priceless artworks that were passed down over centuries by the Imperial Family. The museum's collection ranges from calligraphy, handscrolls, and folding screens to sculptures, ceramics, and swords. Items and artwork used by Emperor Showa (1901–1989) and some of his siblings are also part of the collection. Most pieces are displayed only for a limited time to protect them from light and humidity. Conservation is an ongoing challenge, as many of the pieces are made from wood, paper, or silk and are extremely fragile.

Sannomaru Shozokan has no permanent exhibits; rather, the artwork on display is frequently rotated. Even so, fewer than half of the pieces in the Shozokan's collection have been shown to the public—leaving thousands of never-before-seen treasures awaiting their turn. No two exhibitions are the same, and visitors may never see the same artwork twice.

The museum is currently undergoing renovations that are due to finish in 2026. Part of the new museum building was completed and opened to the public in 2023. The new Shozokan is designed to echo the style of the Imperial Palace, blending modern simplicity with traditional architectural elements, such as diamond-patterned motifs, the verdigris of the copper roofs, and decorative chains that funnel rainwater from the eaves.