

## **Honmaru-goten Palace: History and Aesthetic Taste**

Honmaru-goten Palace is a symbol of the emperor and the imperial family, now situated on the grounds of what was the Tokugawa shogun's castle and Kyoto residence. When visited together with Ninomaru-goten, Honmaru-goten offers insights into the contrasting aesthetic tastes of the imperial court and the warrior class.

### *The original Honmaru-goten Palace*

Nijo-jo Castle was built in 1603 by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the first shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate. Although the shogun was the political ruler of Japan, the emperor remained the official head of state. In 1626, Emperor Go-Mizuno-o (1596–1680) made an imperial visit to Nijo-jo Castle. For this occasion, the castle grounds were expanded, and the first Honmaru-goten Palace was constructed.

### *The current Honmaru-goten Palace*

The palace built for Emperor Go-Mizuno-o's visit was destroyed in the 1788 Great Fire of Kyoto. A temporary palace was constructed and used for several decades before the buildings of the current Honmaru-goten Palace were installed on the grounds. The four buildings were originally part of Katsura-no-miya-goten Palace, the residence of the imperial Katsura-no-miya family. The palace buildings were moved to their current location in 1894 by order of Emperor Meiji (1852–1912). In 1867, the Tokugawa shogun resigned, and political power was returned to the emperor. The custody of Nijo-jo Castle was transferred to the imperial family, and the castle became Nijo Imperial Villa in 1884.

*Honmaru-goten and Ninomaru-goten Palaces and their contrasting aesthetics*

There are noticeable differences in the design of the two palaces at Nijo-jo Castle. The roof of the Honmaru-goten has a more rounded form, with gently curving gables and little embellishment. The building is spacious but not grandiose. In contrast, Ninomaru-goten exudes opulence and authority,

with elaborate carvings, copious gilding, and swooping rooflines.

Paintings decorate the sliding doors in both palaces, but the motifs and the execution differ. For example, in one of the scenes in the aristocratic Honmaru-goten, a crane, a symbol of peace and longevity, watches her chicks play beneath the trailing boughs of a lakeside pine. In the warrior-class Ninomaru-goten, hawks, symbols of strength and authority, are depicted perched high in pine trees, surveying the landscape from sturdy branches.

### *Honmaru-goten Palace over the years*

Emperor Meiji was the first member of the imperial family to make use of the current Honmaru-goten Palace, on an official visit to Nijo Imperial Villa in 1895. During his stay, the emperor named the main rooms of the palace and had a calligraphy work hung in the imperial living chamber on the second floor. The work bears the Chinese characters for *teiju*, expressing the idea of sharing happiness.

In the ensuing decades, both Crown Prince Yoshihito (later Emperor Taisho, 1879–1926) and his son Crown Prince Hirohito (later Emperor Showa, 1901–1989) spent time at the palace. Yoshihito ascended the throne in 1915, and his enthronement banquet was held at Nijo Imperial Villa.

In keeping with the times, modifications were made to the palace. Electric lighting was installed, chandeliers hung, and carpets laid over some of the tatami and panel flooring. Many of the antique light fixtures remain in use.