



JAPAN HERITAGE

日本遺産

Saiku: The Palace of Saio

JAPAN
HERITAGE

- the Imperial
Princess Prays





It is said that over 60 princesses were selected as Saio to set off for Ise during the 660 or so years the Saio system was maintained.

An introduction to the Tales of Saio Palace

The Saio was an unmarried woman from the Imperial Family who served Amaterasu-Omikami (the Sun Goddess who was believed to be an ancestor of the Imperial Family) of Ise Jingu on behalf of the emperor. It is said that over 60 princesses were selected as Saio to set off for Ise during the 660 or so years the system was maintained. The Saio would leave Kyo (the capital), where she was born and raised, to live in Ise and spend her everyday life in Saiku, the palace of the Saio.

Saiku, which has been preserved by the local people as a sacred place, and its related stories were designated as a Japan Heritage by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan under the title of "Saiku: The Palace of Saio - the Imperial Princess Prays" on April 24, 2015. The tales of the prayers of the Saio princesses will take you on a journey to the historical palace, Saiku.

Saiku: The Palace of Saio - the Imperial Princess Prays

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Ōyodo

On the journey to seek a place of enshrinement, a relationship began at the sea of Ōyodo

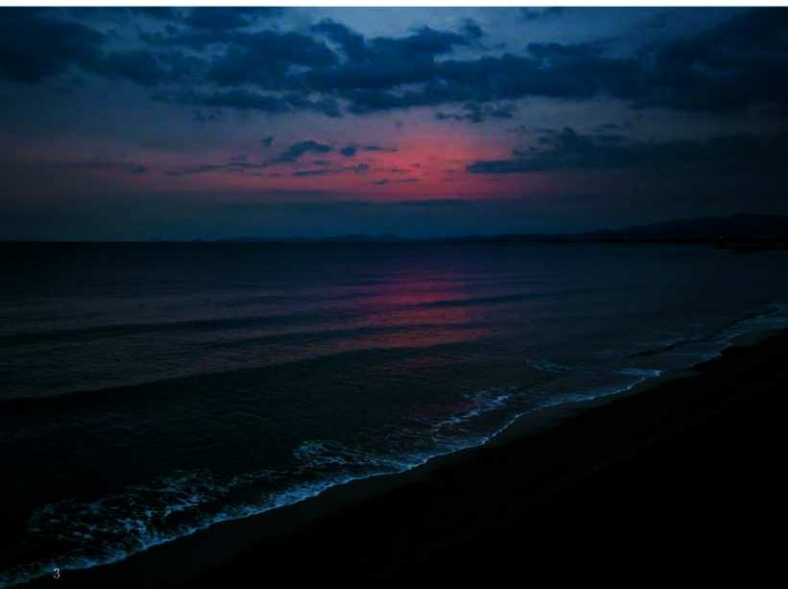
The history of the Saio dates back to the era of Japanese mythology. According to legend, the first Saio to serve as Mitsueshiro (Person supporting God) of Amaterasu-Omikami, was Toyosukirihime-no-mikoto. The role was succeeded by Yamatohime-no-mikoto, who left Yamato Province to seek a place of enshrinement for Amaterasu-Omikami.

Yamatohime-no-mikoto traveled through Iga, Omi, Mino, and other provinces before finally reaching Ise (currently Ōyodo, Meiwa Town). It was the beginning of the relationship between the Saio and Meiwa Town.



Ōyodo, a scenic site reached by Yamatohime-no-mikoto on her journey to find a place of enshrinement for Amaterasu-Omikami

◆ Address: Oaza Ōyodo, Meiwa Town

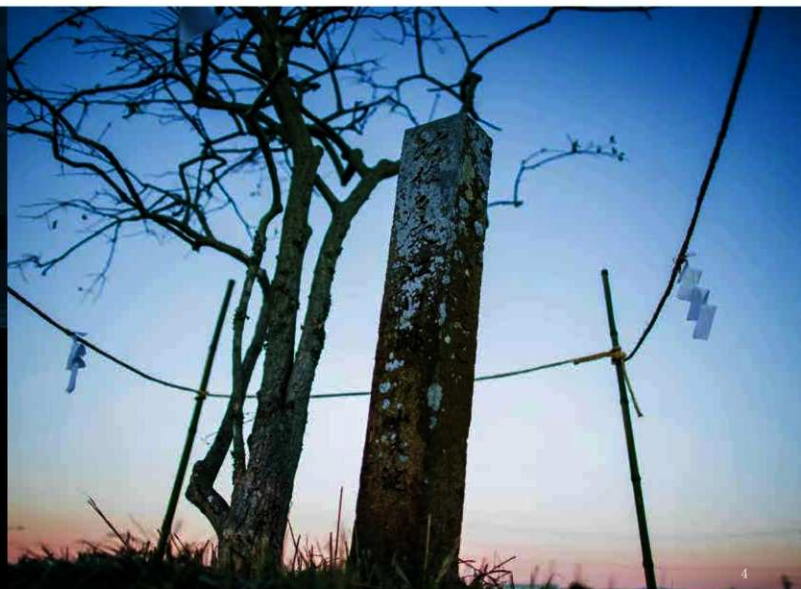


Site of Sasafue Angu (temporary royal palace)

Palace in Sasafue, a legendary place where the princess's ship was anchored

After her arrival in Ise, Yamatohime-no-mikoto spent four years in Iino Takamiya (currently Matsusaka City). Then, the princess traveled down the Kushida River to the sea and anchored her ship in Ōyodo to build Sasafue Angu (temporary royal palace). The palace where Yamatohime-no-mikoto allegedly stayed is now part of the peaceful rural landscape near Sasafue Bridge, located west of Yamaoyodo, and the only sign of the existence of the legendary site is a stone monument with "Site of Takesasafue" engraved on it.

◆ Address: Oaza Yamaoyodo, Meiwa Town





Birthplace of Kakechikara offering

Kakechikara, bundled rice, was hung as an offering for the prosperity of the country to Ise Jingu.

One autumn after Ise Jingu was constructed, a white-naped crane was crying night and day. When Yamatohime-no-mikoto sent someone to the crane, it was holding a stock of rice with 800 ears. The princess offered the rice to Amaterasu-Omikami, which was the beginning of the Kakechikara offering.

Due to this legend of the white-naped crane, Ise Jingu dedicates Kakechikara at uchitamagaki (the second innermost fence) of both of the two main palaces, Naiku and Geku, and mizugaki (the innermost fence) of each Betsugu (associated shrine) on Kannamesai (harvest festival) to express thanks for the harvest of the year. Saiku was established in Meiwa Town, located about 15 km from Ise Jingu, probably because of the connection with this myth.

While standing on the birthplace of the Kakechikara offering and looking up to the sky, one can imagine the graceful figure of the white-naped crane flying to the Ise Jingu of ancient times.

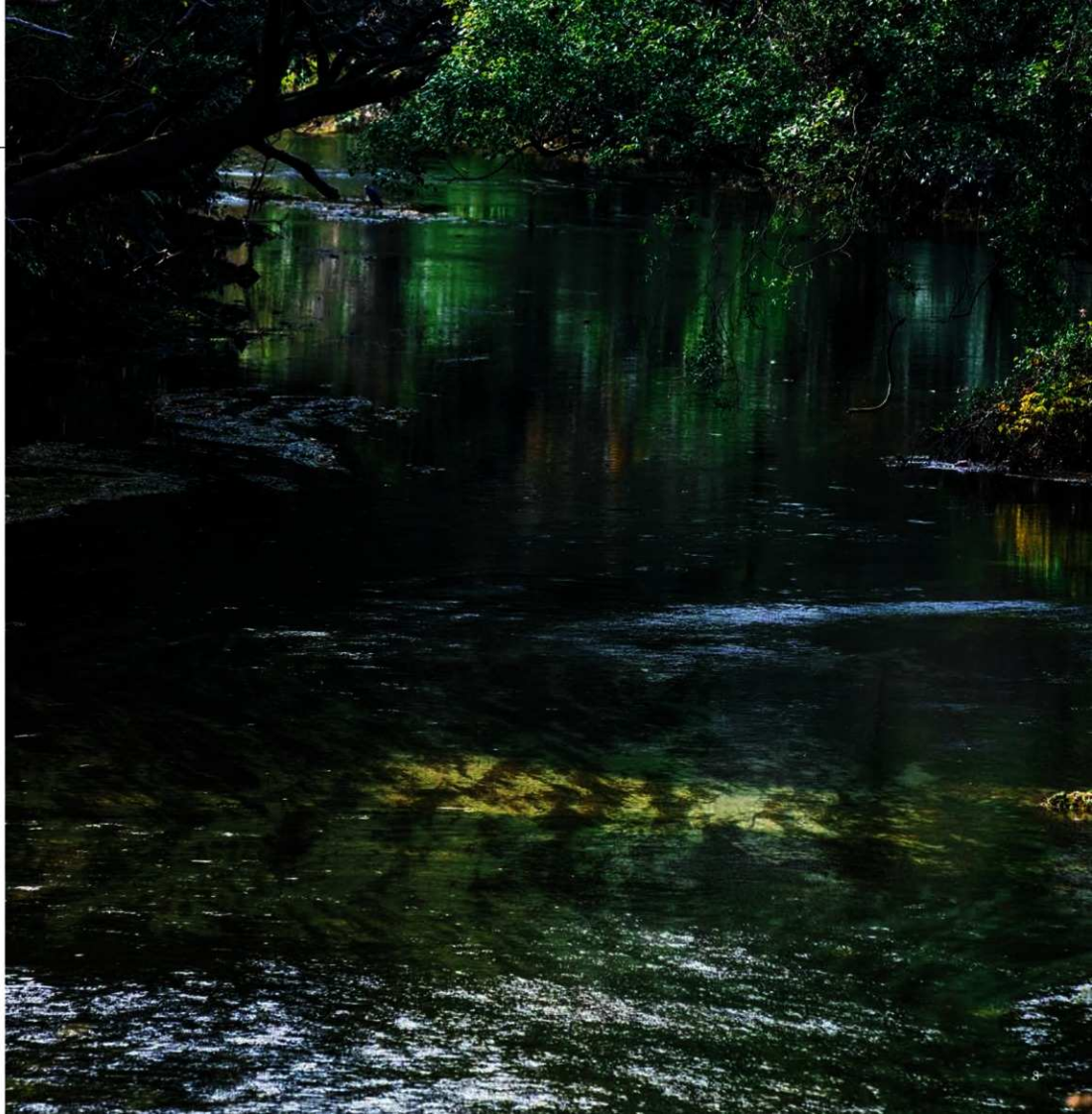
◆ Address: Oaza Nagura, Meiwa Town

Harai River

Once the body and mind were purified in the Harai River, the Saio was ready to approach the deity

After the establishment of the Saio system, the Saio was selected from among unmarried imperial princesses based on a fortune telling when a new emperor was enthroned. The princess appointed as Saio spent about three years doing purification rites to clean her body and mind in Shosaiin (at the Imperial court) and in Nonomiya (palace at a temporary outskirts of the capital). Then, accompanied by hundreds of servants, the Saio would depart from the capital for Saiku riding on the Sokaren Palanquin.

This journey, Saio Gunko (Saio's procession), was a purification rite lasting six days and five nights. She performed the final purification in the Harai River, which flowed at the entrance of Shinryo (land directly controlled by Ise Jingu) before finally reaching Saiku. When viewing the quiet river, one may feel as if they can see the fate of the Saio of 1,000 years ago on the surface of the water.



Site of Saio Ononominato Purification Ceremony

The ancient Saio purified herself at this beach which is the remaining site of the Ononominato Purification Ceremony where blue skies spread.

The Saio visited Ise Jingu for ritual services only three times a year, namely Tsukinamisai in June and December and Kannamesai in September, based on the lunar calendar. These three rituals were collectively referred to as Sansetsusai.

In preparation for Kannamesai, the Saio purified herself on the beach of Oyodo at the end of August.

While the Site of the Ononominato Purification Ceremony was located close to the shore at the time, it is now at a distance from the sea.

While looking up at the stone monument indicating the "Site of the Saio Ononominato Purification Ceremony" under the blue sky, one can imagine how the Saio performed the purification rite, the details of which are still unknown.

◆ Address: Ko, Oaza Oyodo, Meiwa Town



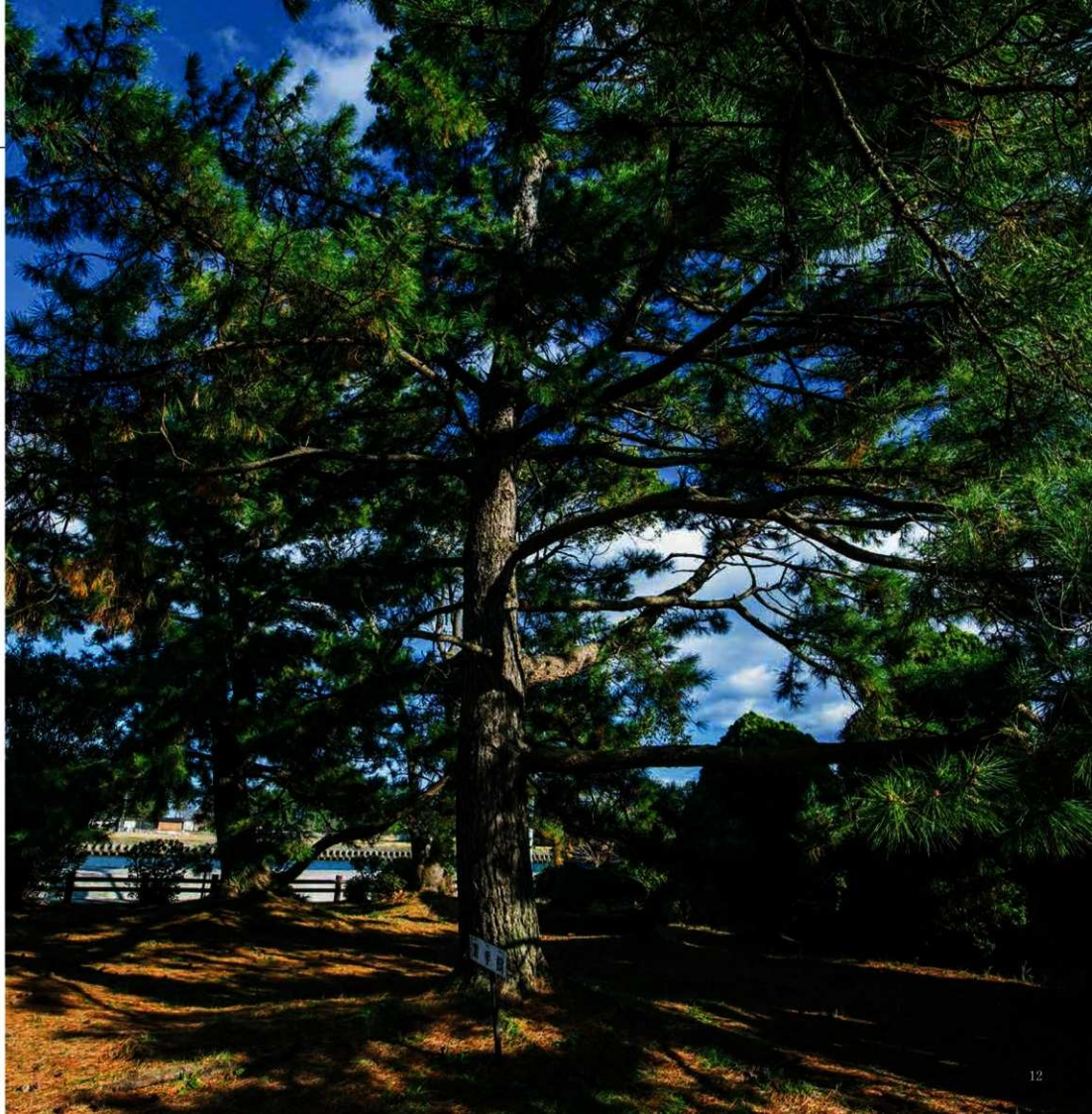
Narihira's Pine

Narihira's Pine's sad love story

In "the Tales of Ise", there is a passage called "Karinotsukai" in which the Saio is in love with a hunter of the royal court. It is believed these characters are modeled on the Imperial Princess Yasuko (Saio) and Ariwara no Narihira, a member of the imperial court. According to the story, they only met for one night. Narihira wanted to meet her again, but because he had to go to Owari Province they only exchanged poems expressing their sorrows of the farewell. In the surrounding area, it is believed that they composed the poems for each other under a pine tree on Oyodo Coast, now called Narihira's Pine. The present pine is the third tree planted by Narihira's Pine Preservation Society. The surrounding area has been developed as Narihira Park and is popular among local residents.

In addition, the Saio appeared in many dynastic literary works, including "Yamato Monogatari," "Eiga Monogatari," "Sarashina Nikki" and "Okagami". Most of the stories were about tragic love due to the fate of the Saio as an unmarried princess to serve the deity. While walking in Narihira Park, one can imagine the scenes of tales about love in vain.

◆ Address: Ko, Oaza Oyodo, Meiwa Town



Monument at Takegawa no Hanazono

Saio alleviated herself from in Saiku at Takegawa no Hanazono

The Saio and Saiku also appear in many parts of "the Tale of Genji," the most famous narrative literary work from the Heian period.

For example, in the Sakaki Chapter, Rokujo no Miyasun'dokoro, one of the main characters in the work moves from the capital to Ise with her daughter, the new Saio. Then in the Eawase Chapter, the daughter retires from being the Saio and enters into the palace of Emperor Reizei who was called the Saiku no Nyogo. It is said that the story was modeled on Princess Yoshiko, who actually visited Saiku to accompany her daughter, the Imperial Princess Noriko.

In addition, Takegawa, an existing place-name of Saiku, appeared in the Takekawa Chapter, which depicts a scene where love poems, set in a flower garden in Takegawa, were introduced at a banquet. It is presumed that, in the era when Saio lived, this area was close to a river and had a panoramic view of the flower garden. The Saio must have seen beautiful seasonal flowers that soothed her heart while she reminisced of old times in the capital.

◆ Address: Oaza Takegawa, Meiwa Town



Articles unearthed from Saiku-ato site

(collection of Saiku Historical Museum)

While reminiscing about her days in the capital, the Saio led her life in the palace in Ise.

While the life of the Saio in Saiku was modest, centered on the offering of prayers, part of the high life in the capital was also duplicated in the palace. For example, the Saio wore a Juni-Hitoe (ceremonial kimono) played games of the time such as Kai-awase (shell matching) and Bansugoroku (an Asian-style backgammon), and composed poems. Excavation research at Saiku-ato site has unearthed various artifacts, including green-glazed ceramics, earthenware with inscriptions of letters and symbols in black ink, and ritual objects, all of which provide clues about the everyday life of Saio.

In particular, many pieces of green-glazed ceramics, which was used in the court of the time, have been unearthed, indicating the glamorous lifestyle in Saiku. It can be presumed that the reproduction of the familiar lifestyle in the capital was a joy for the Saio.

◆ Address: 503 Oaza Takegawa, Meiwa Town (Saiku Historical Museum; See page 26 for details)



A piece of a green-glazed ceramics incense burner and a replica



Bowl with Japanese
Alphabet inscriptions in black ink



Sheep-shaped inkstone

Grave of Princess Takako

In a remote area surrounded by greenery, the Grave of Princess Takako has an atmosphere full of SORROW

A Saio was relieved from her post when an emperor passed away or abdicated the throne, when a Saio's relative passed away, or another bad event occurred. This was referred to as "Taige," and the Saio moved from the "Honza", the space where she should be, to another building. On her way back to the capital after her retirement, she would take one of two paths. If the retirement was due to the abdication of the throne by the emperor, she would return the same way she came, by going through the Suzuka Pass and Omi Road. In the case of retirement due to an unfortunate event, she would travel by the Iga and Yamato Roads. In either case, she performed a purification rite in Naniwazu (an ancient port in present-day Osaka City) before secretly entering the capital.

Princess Takako, who was a granddaughter of Emperor Daigo, was sent to Ise as Saio for the generation of Emperor Enyu, but passed away due to illness after only four years of service. It was the first time that a Saio died in Saiku, and it can be easily inferred that she was buried in respect. The grave where Princess Takako sleeps (administered by the Imperial Household Agency) is surrounded by trees, bearing a dignified air. The sorrow of her death seems to still be in the air even after 1,000 years.

◆ Address: Oaza Sata, Meiwa Town





◆ Lost palace

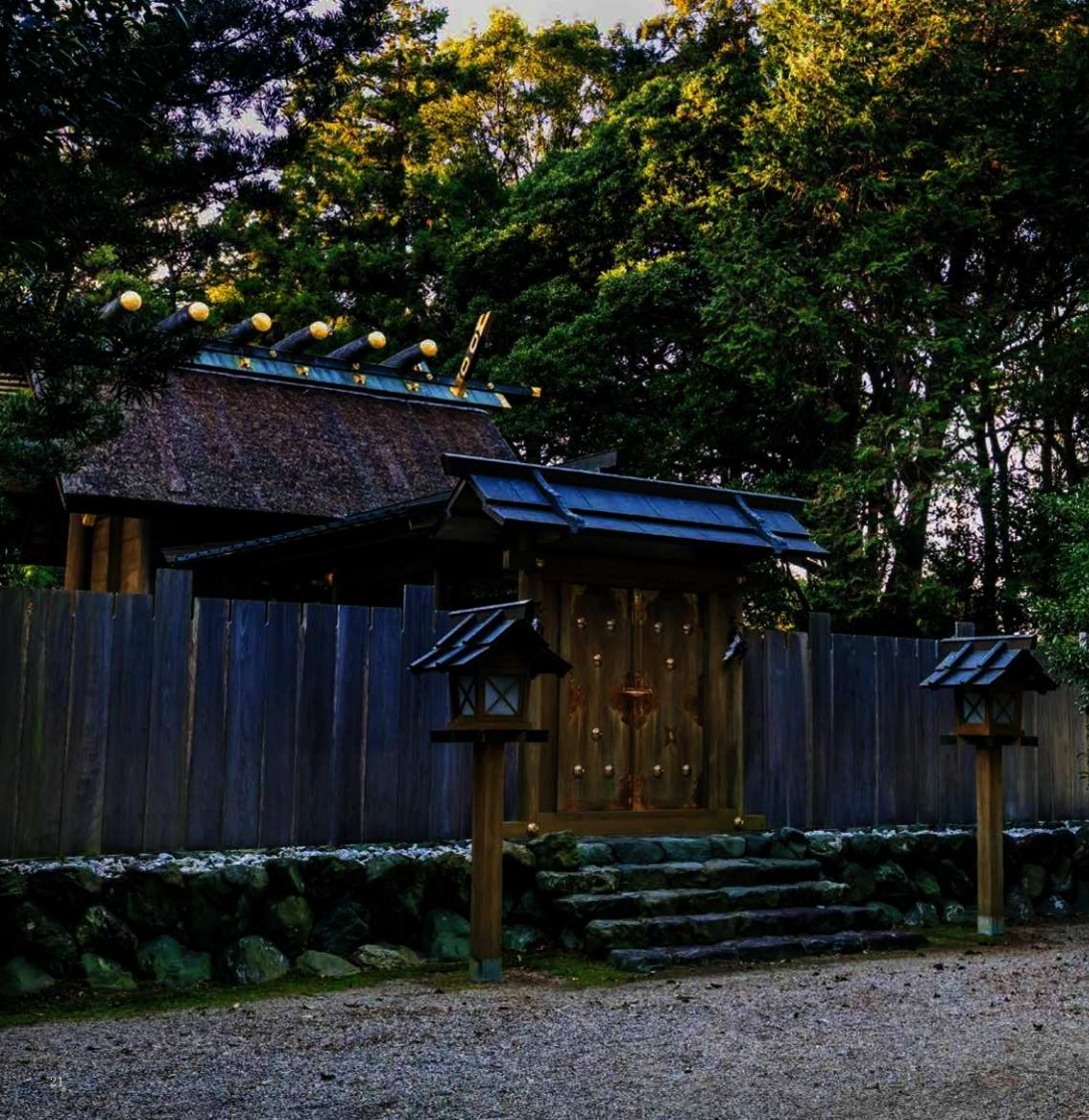
Saio Woods

Soft sunlight filtering through trees is cast on the memory of the palace in Saio Woods

The first Saio after the initiation of the Saio system was Imperial Princess Ōku, a daughter of Emperor Tenmu. The Saio system was maintained for about 660 years from that time, and came to an end with Imperial Princess Sachiko, a daughter of Emperor Godaigo, as the final Saio due to domestic war in the period of the Northern and Southern Courts. As a result, the Saio system, which had created various historical facts and legend, was buried in history, and Saiku became a "lost palace."

Nevertheless, local residents of Saiku had believed the stories of Saio and Saiku handed down through generations by word of mouth, and carefully preserved the area where the palace of Saio was allegedly located, now known as "Saio Woods." In the woods are located a stone monument of the site of Saio's royal palace and a Kuroki no Torii (traditional gate to a shrine)

◆ Address: Oaza Saiku, Meiwa Town



Take Shrine (Nonomiya)

The prayers of Saio have remained in Take Shrine over a long period of history

Take Shrine (Nonomiya) is a sacred place where Saio's royal palace was allegedly located and various deities are now enshrined. The place was known as "Kyuchi no Mori" or "Nonomiya" in the Edo period.

Excavation research conducted in recent years has identified the traces of mounds, gutters, and fences surrounding Take Shrine in the Heian period, leading to the assumption that Saio's royal palace was located there. Many pieces of dishes with Japanese Alphabet inscriptions in black ink were found in the excavation research, and it is thought that women who served Saio used them for writing practice.

When you visit Take Shrine, which maintains its solemn atmosphere, you can feel the life of Saio who enjoyed a graceful lifestyle while living a pure life. The place that served as a base for prayers in the Heian period is still worshipped as a local shrine and has handed down the spirit of prayers.

◆ Address: Oaza Saiku, Meiwa Town



❖ Restoration of Saiku

Saiku-ato site

Saio's lost palace has been restored for the future

The lost palace, Saiku, was rediscovered in the Showa era (1926-1989). Excavation research confirmed that Saiku had actually existed, and Saiku-ato site was designated as a national historical site in 1979. It was revealed that sections in square divisions called "Hokaku Chiwari," like the capital, were developed in an orderly manner with roads, planted trees, and more than 100 neat and clean buildings similar to the shrine buildings of Ise Jingu. More than 500 officials of various roles worked in the city to exclusively support the Saio who served Amaterasu-Omikami.

◆ Address: Oaza Saiku, Meiwa Town (Historic park "Saiku Heian Era Park"; See page 25 for details)



Nishiwakiden



Seiden



Higashiwakiden

Seiden, Nishiwakiden, and Higashiwakiden were the three main buildings of "Ryochō," a government office used by the head of Saikyū for rites and banquets in the 9th century. They have been restored to their original size on the site where they were found during excavation research.

The Palace of Saio MAP



Guide to the Japan Heritage, Saiku App Available!

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Access to Meiwa Town



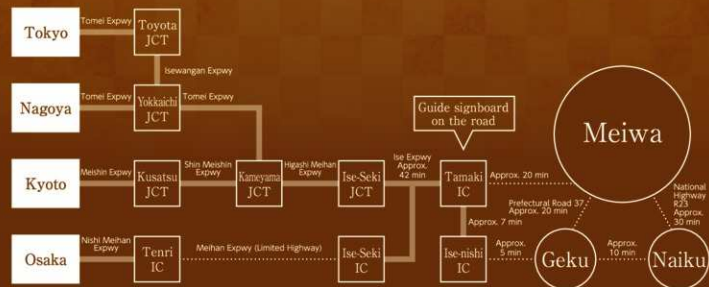
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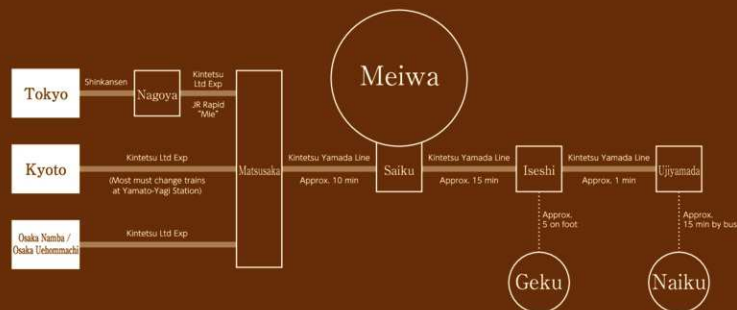
Saiku Historical Museum

503, Takekawa, Oaza, Meiwa Town, Takigun, Mie Prefecture TEL.0596-52-3800

Itsukinomiya Hall for Historical Experience 3046-25, Saiku, Oaza, Meiwa Town, Takigun, Mie Prefecture TEL.0596-52-3890



By Train



Japan Heritage Utilization Promotion Council of Meiwa Town

(Office: Saiku-ato Culture and Tourism Division, Meiwa Town, Mie Prefecture)

Agency for Cultural Affairs

This brochure has been prepared as part of the Japan Heritage Promotion Project Initiative.