



WHERE TO GO AND WHAT TO SEE AND LEARN IN AKASAKA AND AOYAMA

Akasaka and Aoyama are old historical towns where traces of various events are etched everywhere. Living or working in Akasaka and Aoyama, we may begin to think that we know everything there is to know. But the reality is that we do not, and therefore we sometimes wonder about the details surrounding certain events. Occasionally, we may even discover new tidbits of history we overlooked in the past.

In this issue, we collected information that you may not have known about Akasaka and Aoyama. How many of these did you know? Let's find out!

No.1 **Mural at Gallery Sanyodo**

Is it true that the large distinctive mural at Omotesando Intersection had a different picture at one time?

The original design was of a red balloon with a yellow background, and was changed to the current design titled, "The Loss of the Umbrella is the First Star" in 1975.

This mural is a mosaic by Rokuro Taniuchi, who designed the front covers of the "Shukan Shincho" magazine for 25 consecutive years. The first mural was created when renovation work was done to expand the Aoyama-dori road in preparation for the 1963 Tokyo Olympics. Saving the first mural became difficult when exterior work was required – thus the mural was changed to the second one. So Olympians who visited Tokyo from all over the world approximately 50 years ago saw a different mural than the one we see today.

Location/3-5-22 Kita-aoiyama

No.2 **Aoyama-kitamachi Apartment**

Where can we find a Showa retro-style building?

Surrounded by trees on the north side of Aoyama-dori is the Aoyama-kitamachi Apartment, a municipally-owned housing complex built from 1957 to 1968.

The Tokyo Prefectural Normal School (currently the Tokyo Gakugei University) and its elementary school were previously located here after having been moved from Koishikawa in 1901. After these two schools were transferred to an outside district in 1936, the 15th Tokyo Prefectural Junior High School (currently Tokyo Metropolitan Aoyama High School) was established in 1940, but was burned down in the Great Tokyo Air Raid of 1945. The housing complex was built after the war. There is a stone monument showing the site of Tokyo Prefectural Normal School.

Location /3-4 Kita-aoiyama

No.5 **Tessen-kai**

Step Back in Time to the Muromachi Period!

When walking the length of Miyuki-dori and passing the architecturally-designed buildings from Minami-aoiyama to Omotesando Station, you will see a large building called Tessen-kai Noh-gaku Institute. There, "Aoyama Noh" is performed on the Noh stage located on the second floor. Performers wearing masks and costumes sing and dance. You can see the Noh-gaku which was perfected by Zeami in the Muromachi Period.

Tessen-kai, led by the family of Kanze Tetsunojo, offer regular performances, Noh classes for children, workshops for teachers of Japanese language and music, and lectures after the shows. You can encounter this 600 year old traditional art in Aoyama.

Location/4-21-29 Minami-aoiyama
Contact/Telephone: 03-3401-2285

No.8 **Bamboo walkway of Aoyama Baisouin Temple**

Discover the secrets of a refreshing bamboo walkway.

There is a spectacular 40 meter long bamboo arc from Aoyama-dori to the gate of Baisouin Temple. Mr. Kawazoe of the Public Relations Division says, 'These bamboo trees are called Kinmeimousouchiku, brought from Kurume by the architectural designer Kuma Kengo in 2004 when Baisouin Temple was renovated. The characteristic of the bamboo is the green and gold cylindrical parts appearing alternately.' Maintaining the freshness is not easy work. Staff members sweep the walkway each morning and evening, and a specialist gardener is employed to control the number of bamboo shoots. Near the end of the walkway in front of the hand-wash basin and the lanterns, there are two Chigo Jizo (Child Jizo) statues which were previously located on the temple premises. Come and enjoy strolling down a bamboo walkway in an urban space – which has a very different feel to walking along a similar road in a historical city. Gazing at the Jizo statues, the whimsical facial expressions may lighten your mood as well.

Location/2-26-38 Minami-aoiyama
Contact/Telephone: 03-3404-8447
<http://www.baisouin.or.jp/>

No.11 **State Guest House**

Why don't you visit the luxurious State Guest House?

Surrounded by rich greenery, the luxurious State Guest House stands with pride. It was built in 1909 in a corner of the site where the residence of the Kishu-Tokugawa clan's old Edo (Tokyo) used to be. A court architect named Katayama Tokuma designed the house. It is the only Neo-Baroque style western building in Japan, and is designated as a national treasure. It was originally built as a residence for the Crown Prince. After the war, the National Diet Library was founded here, and then the government started using the building as accommodation for state and official guests. Kings, queens and presidents have stayed here - the high-profile King and Queen of Bhutan stayed here last year.

You might wonder why a western-style building is being used to welcome official guests from overseas. Well, traditional Japanese touches have been added, such as the Japanese-style annex, 'Yushinte'i' located on the premises. Additionally, Japanese meals and dance shows are occasionally provided to guests.

A random selection process is utilized each summer to allow members of the general public to visit (unfortunately this year's selection process has already been closed). The front courtyard is open to the public each autumn. This will take place between Thursday, November 1st and Saturday, November 3rd this year. No pre-booking is necessary. Please check the website for more details.

Location/2-1-1 Moto-akasaka
<http://www8.cao.go.jp/geihinkan/>

No.12 **Embassy of Canada to Japan**

Is it true there is a hanging garden we can visit anytime?

Walk past the long escalator, and you will suddenly feel Canadian air blowing around you. A lovely piece of art portraying waves crashing against the rocks of the Atlantic Ocean welcomes us to the embassy. We can walk through a corridor symbolizing gardens of Canada. Beginning with the Precambrian rocks of the Arctic, there is a stone sculpture of Inuksuk, the directional landmark used by early settlers for navigation and hunting and ultimately used as the basis of the logo design of the 2010 Winter Olympics held in Vancouver. Then the majestic Canadian Rocky Mountains appear. As you walk through the calm Pacific waves, you will reach the final destination - a Japanese garden designed by Masuno Shunmyo, a Zen monk and a garden designer. Two rocks symbolizing communication between Japan and Canada will warmly welcome you in silence.

Use your imagination as you stroll the length of the corridor, and you will most assuredly feel as if you are in Canada.

(Photographs supplied by: Embassy of Canada to Japan)

Office is occasionally closed for Canadian and Japanese public holidays.
<http://www.japan.gc.ca/>

No.3 **The Graduate School of Project Design**

Life restored to a 200 year old sacred tree.

There was an old wooden house located just off Aoyama-dori, and the camphor tree located in front of the house used to be a grand tree over a dozen meters high. A 1975 Minato-ku reference book listed the trunk circumference as 4.2 meters. The tree was cut down before the land was sold, and only a large stump remained. Soon after Sendenkaigi Co., Ltd. bought the land, two small buds were found. The building was thus designed around the tree so as not to hinder the growth of the roots. In 1996, more buds emerged one after another, and a year later the tree had grown taller than the first story of the building. Seeing the tree bouncing back to life, there was talk of protecting the tree for a long time. In December of 2000, the tree was labeled a sacred tree in a ritual ceremony performed by priests of the Kumano Hongu Taisha Shrine of Wakayama Prefecture.

Today, the tree is standing graciously with its leaves fluttering in the wind at the gates of Aoyama's Graduate School of Project Design, as if protecting the emerging buds of academism. The shrine next to the tree is the guardian deity of the stump.

No.6 **Miyuki-dori**

Why does Miyuki-dori have eccentric buildings?

We interviewed an urban planner named Mr. Kamiya Hirotsada. He shared his knowledge of the history of Miyuki-dori with us.

"When Issei Miyake opened his boutique, From First Building (Yamashita Kazumasa) in Aoyama in 1975, more pioneering architectural designers such as Yoji Yamamoto's Y's Super Position (Uchida Shigeru) were inspired to showcase their artistic visions on Miyuki-dori. Minami-aoiyama Square (Mitsui Jun) and overseas brand Prada Boutique Aoyama (Herzog & de Meuron) have opened there recently, and the number of distinctive buildings has increased. Other than fashion, Nezu Museum (Kuma Kengo), Collezione (Ando Tadao), Yoku Moku Building (Gendaikaikaku Architectural & Planning Office) and Sankono Building (Nagata Masashi) were built there. In contrast to these modern designs, we can see traditional historical monuments in the area as well, such as the small shrine on Miyuki-dori. Thus we see a blending of modern and traditional designs."

* Names in parentheses are the architectural designers.

No.9 **Old Nogi Residence**

Is there a Meiji village in Akasaka?

These are the stables where General Maresuke Nogi of the Meiji period kept his beloved horses 'Su' and 'Aratama,' along with a well for the horses. Compared to the wooden Nogi Manor, the stables are made of bricks, which were considered valuable materials in 1889.

The cylindrical structure in the photograph is the main well for the horses, and there was another well a short distance away. We can see how important the horses were to Nogi. The stables are now designated properties of Minato-ku.

Location/8-11-32 Akasaka

No.13 **Takahashi Korekiyo Memorial Park**

Visit mysterious and lifelike statues.

These stone statues are called 'Bunjizo (Statues of Bunjin).' 'Bunjin' means scholar or artist. The statues were originally placed to protect a king's grave and were mostly seen in China, the Korean Peninsula and western Japan. In Japan, these statues are used as artistic objects for the garden. Although only four 'Bunjizo' were listed on the information board of the park, we counted six of them in the park. According to a staff member of the Minato-ku Public Works Subsection who manages the park, the statues were donated when the nearby buildings were rebuilt about 30 years ago. All the statues are in different sizes with individual facial expressions. They seem almost lifelike in appearance and evoke a sense of mystery.

Location/Inside Takahashi Korekiyo Memorial Park, 7-3 Akasaka

No.14 **Benkei Bridge**

Is the Benkei Bridge in Akasaka the actual location of "Ushiwakamaru and his subordinate Benkei?"

'Benkei Bridge' is the only bridge in the Akasaka & Aoyama area, and connects Akasaka (Minato-ku) and Kioicho (Chiyoda-ku). Do you know why this bridge is called 'Benkei Bridge'?

Does it have any connection to Musashibo Benkei or Ushiwakamaru (Minamoto no Yoshitsune)? The answer is that it was taken from the name of the head builder 'Benkei Kozakemaru' who built the moat (outer moat in the Edo period). Unfortunately, there is no connection to the tale of "Ushiwakamaru and his subordinate Benkei."

The middle of the bridge provides a border between the two Ku regions. Both Minato-ku and Chiyoda-ku share the maintenance of the bridge, but the surface of the bridge is maintained solely by Chiyoda-ku.

No.16 **Ichigo-gaoka**

What is the historical looking park at the end of the row of cherry trees at Akasaka Sacas?

Ichigo-gaoka is a small park on the premises of the Akasaka Park Building.

The entire area, including Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS), is where the 'The Third Infantry Regiment for the Imperial Guard' was located. Therefore, there were Ichigo (ginko) trees, a monument and symbol of the guard; and the park is called 'Ichigo-gaoka' to tell the history of that time. During the 'February 26th Incident,' Lieutenant Nakahashi Motoaki's group left this place and attacked Takahashi Korekiyo's residence. Akasaka was once a military town, and locations such as Ichigo-gaoka Park can teach us of this history.

No.4 **The Monument of 'The Place Where Takano Choei Died'**

Did you know that there is a place connected to Takano Choei, scholar of Rangaku (Western learning) of the Edo period, in Aoyama?

On the left post of Spiral Building, there is a monument with the inscription 'The Place Where Takano Choei Died.' Takano Choei studied Rangaku enthusiastically under Philipp Franz von Siebold, but was arrested when the Tokugawa Shogunate decided that his book 'The Tale of a Dream' was a criticism of the Shogunate. Takano arranged to have a fire started in the prison and made his escape. He secretly carried on provided medical service where the monument is currently located, but was caught by the police and killed himself at the age of 47. This bitter remembrance of history casually placed in a glamorous and trendy building shows the depth of Aoyama's history.

Location /5-6-23 Minami-aoiyama

No.7 **Aoyama Elementary School**

Are there fireflies living in Aoyama?

In 2004, the Aoyama Elementary School in Minato-ku first started keeping fireflies to 'create a school with dreams.' The 'Firefly Watching Night' is held in June every year, and approximately 600 children and adults visit to enjoy a fantastic evening surrounded by fireflies.

Location/2-21-2 Minami-aoiyama

No.10 **Trace of a Tributary Named Kougai-kawa River**

Was there a river at Minami-aoiyama 4-chome?

Kougai-kawa River is a tributary of the Shibuya-kawa River, and is now entirely in a culvert. It starts from Minami-aoiyama 3-chome, runs across the valley on the south-western side of Minami-aoiyama 4-chome to the east, and then joins the main stream on the western side of Gaien Nishi-dori alongside Aoyama Bridge. The river is thought to have been used to water the farmlands of the tobichi (detached) territories which existed at that time in Harajuku-mura. A portion of the palisade built to expand the farmland remains, and we can see part of it between the houses in the photograph. In this next additional photograph, we see that the walkway going down to the valley is not a slope, but stairs.

No.15 **Camel Artwork**

Why are there golden camels at the entrance of Ushinaki-zaka Slope?

During the heyday of the bubble economy in the 1980s, there were popular discos such as Juliana in Roppongi, but there were also some lesser known discos like Mugen and White House. White House remained there after changing its name, first to Black & White and then to Camel, but it is now the Akasaka Jewelry Design School. Because the previous owner has since passed away and the school changed hands, no one knows the exact details as to why it was named Camel.

Location/4-7-16 Akasaka

No.18 **Hochou-zuka/Akasaka Hikawa Shrine**

What is the stone statue at Akasaka Hikawa Shrine with the inscription of 'Hochou-zuka' (a mound for kitchen knives)?

We interviewed Horigome Kazuyuki of the founding group (President of Akasaka Aoyama Food and Beverage Union).

"The statue was built by head chefs to mark the 20th anniversary of the Union in 1974 to remind us of the importance of kitchen knives. In early October, the Union holds the 'Annual Celebration of Hochou-zuka' to help all of us head chefs highlight the importance of cooking for everyone in the culinary business in Akasaka and Aoyama and to allow us to directly thank our customers as well."

The stone statue to the left of the mound, which was built for the 30th anniversary, has a bowl shaped design on top of the two 'A' representing Akasaka and Aoyama.

Location/6-10-11 Akasaka (inside Akasaka Hikawa Shrine)

