



*Illustrated Screen of Edo, Edo Zu Byoubu, 17th century
courtesy of National Museum of Japanese History*

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867) Enjoying Sites and Sights

Timon Screech, Great Britain

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights



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Edo themes are persistent in clichés about Japan

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- Motivation** Japan's Edo Period still excites great interest around the world. Everyone knows about *shoguns*, *samurai*, and *geisha*. But what was the Edo Period really like, and what are the special features of its art and culture? This essay provides comments, and suggestions for further exploration.
- Objective** Introducing a series of sites, this essay provides visitors to Japan with extra information on areas they may already know something about. Travelers are encouraged to see Japan through its regional art, culture, and countryside as well as its major cities.
- Context** The Edo Period lasted almost 250 years and is still crucial to Japanese self-awareness, and to the international perception of Japan. Edo is extensively drawn on in contemporary popular culture, such as *manga* and *anime*, and Edo themes are persistent in ideas of Japan found around the world.

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights



Minamoto Yoritomo, founder of the Kamakura shogunate (1185-1333), Fujiwara Takanobu courtesy of Takaosan Jingoji



Ashikaga Takauji, founder of the Muromachi shogunate (1336-1573) courtesy of Jyodoji (photograph by Murakami Koji)



Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Edo shogunate (1603-1867), Kimura Ryotaku, courtesy of Tokugawa Memorial Foundation

Japan has seen three dynasties of shoguns, beginning in the 12th century and ending in the 19th. It was the last of these, ruling from 1603-1867, that concerns us. In that period, much of Japanese culture was solidified, from tea ceremony to *sumo*, from *kabuki* to *geisha*. Some culture belonged to the townspeople, but above them were the samurai who are the topic of this essay.

Actually, the term *samurai* has its origin in the verb *saburau*, 侍う, meaning to be in service, or to wait on someone. Samurai were attendants to senior warlords, known as *daimyo*. During the long civil war (1467-1600), samurai fought, but after the new shogunate of the Tokugawa was declared in 1603, they mutated into bureaucrats, though continuing to carry swords. They became warriors in name only. In this essay we look both at sites where artifacts of the samurai still exist, and at places where materials are gone, but memories survive, and finally we look at museums where samurai art is preserved.

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights

Samurai Sites



Hikone Castle, on the shore of Biwako lake, ©Biwako Visitors Bureau



Genkyu-En Garden, a daimyo garden built in 1677, ©Biwako Visitors Bureau



Yomeimon Gate, Nikko Toshogu Shrine ©Nikko City Tourism Association, courtesy of Nikko Toshogu Shrine

Hikone Castle

The Tokugawa shoguns ruled from Edo, current Tokyo. They controlled Japan's main cities but only about 20% of the countryside. Most of Japan was parceled out among regional warlords, or daimyo. Each daimyo resided periodically in Edo, but had his base in a castle town, or *joka-machi*. Few castle towns survive, but Hikone is one, and its castle still dominates the skyline, with massive walls and a keep soaring above the houses below. The Ii daimyo family who ruled from here were celebrated for their cultural attainments. Some were masters of tea, and many were art connoisseurs. The castle was clearly built for use in war, but it had gorgeous gardens and a Noh theater stage for the daimyo and his retainers to watch plays. The modern Castle Museum exhibits the family treasures.

Nikko

The first Edo shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, died while living in a retirement castle in Sunpu (modern Shizuoka) in 1616. Advisors considered what to do with his legacy and with his body. He was declared a Shinto kami (god) named *Radiance of the East*. This referred to the sun, but also to Edo, which is to the east of Kyoto. The new god was declared an avatar of the Medicine Buddha.

A splendid Buddhist-Shinto mausoleum was built near Sunpu, but one year on, Ieyasu's body was moved to a new site, which thereafter became the focus of his cult. This was Nikko, an old holy mountain, some four days walk from Edo – today less than two hours by train.

The sumptuous buildings of this second Buddhist-Shinto complex, which was rebuilt in the 1630s, are now a World Heritage Site.

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Samurai Sites



Koishikawa Korakuen Garden
 ©Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau

Koishikawa Korakuen Garden

It is amazing that one of the best-preserved daimyo gardens is in the middle of Tokyo. Though reduced in size, its finest parts can still be seen. The layout was completed in the late 17th century by the renowned daimyo of Mito, Tokugawa Mitsukuni, a cousin of the shogun, hence a person of tremendous power.

Edo daimyo gardens were for strolling, unlike Kyoto's Zen ones. Visitors were led past a sequence of sites, which might be beautiful trees or ponds, but also miniaturized imitations of famous sites in Japan and China. Imaginatively built tea houses were dotted about for visitors to rest in.

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Wall painting Cherry Blossom, Hasegawa Kyuzo, courtesy of Chishakuin

Chishakuin Temple

Kyoto has many wonderful temples, but most are on the fringes of the city. A terrible fire consumed Kyoto in 1788, with almost nothing left in the central area. Most temples, being outlying, were saved, and eastern part of Kyoto, beyond the Kamogawa river, was unscathed. Thanks to this, we can still see the magnificent Chishakuin.

Founded in the 14th century, it was destroyed during the Civil Wars, but rebuilt and patronized by the Tokugawa family, as well as by daimyo wanting to curry the shogun's favor.

The temple's treasures include early Edo buildings, and wall paintings – *shohekiga* – painted by members of the Hasegawa school. Reproductions have been installed in the original site, with the works themselves moved to the museum next door.



Kondo, the main building of
Chishakuin Temple, ©Chishakuin

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights

Evocative Places



Nagasaki Port
 ©nagasakiport.iinaa.net



Chief Factor's Residence at Dejima
 ©Nagasaki Prefecture Convention and
 Tourism Association



Sofukuji Temple
 ©Nagasaki Prefecture Convention and
 Tourism Association

Nagasaki

Nagasaki was built by Portuguese Jesuits coming to convert the Japanese. Traders came too, anxious for local silver. Nagasaki has one of the world's best natural harbors, and by the 1580s it flourished as an international Christian city. However, in 1614 Roman Catholic priests and monks were expelled from Japan, and many anti-Christian laws followed. Finally, all Japan was closed to Iberians, though the Protestant English and Dutch remained, trading in another port.

In 1640, the Dutch relocated here, the English having already left, because Japanese silver was running out.

The shoguns now took Nagasaki under their direct control, fearful Christianity might rise again. The city's government compound has recently been rebuilt and houses a Museum of History and Culture. The old Portuguese trading post, inherited by the Dutch, was a small island known as *Dejima*. It has been reconstructed to give its early 19th century appearance.

Because of the affects of the Atomic Bomb, much of old Nagasaki exists now only in memory, though there is still plenty to see. Visitors will find Edo Period temples, and some of the best were made by the city's large Chinese community. There are also Christian churches from more modern periods.

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Evocative Places



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Yatsunashi in the 17th century scroll of The Tale of Ise, Sumiyoshi Jokei courtesy of TNM (Tokyo National Museum) Image Archives

Yatsunashi

The Japanese landscape is dotted with places where poets wrote famous verses. These are called poetic pillows or *utamakura*. The verses are not known by most people today, but in the past, they were fundamental parts of elite education.

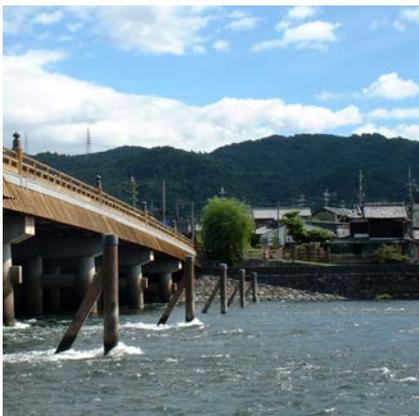
Most *utamakura* were in the Kyoto area, since ancient poets were Kyoto courtiers, but Yatsunashi is different. Meaning eight bridges, the ancient poem composed there tells of a man stopping on his way into exile in the distant east. The journey taken by this poet led to what centuries later would become Edo. Because of its role in later political history, Yatsunashi emerged as one of the most remembered of all *utamakura*, and it was often the subject of paintings as well as miniaturised scenery in daimyo gardens.

Uji

In the past, Japan had few bridges: melting mountain snow washed them away each spring. Uji was special with a huge, strong structure, very important as it secured access to Kyoto. The spot was much travelled and much fought over in history. Uji was also an *utamakura*, with many poems written about it, and because the place name puns on the word for sadness – 憂し, *ushi* – it became a site of tragic verses.

A mythical young lady of Uji bridge – *Uji no hashigimi* – lived her doleful life here, and was often imagined in poetry.

Uji has two fine temples, the Byodoin and the Manpukuji. It is also known for the quality of its tea, which the shogun himself requested be sent to Edo.



Uji Bridge, a popular subject in art and literature, ©Uji City

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Evocative Places



Reconstructed stone pavement of the former Tokaido road in Kanaya
©Shizuoka Prefecture Tourism Association



Nihonbashi
©Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau



Road distances from Tokyo to everywhere in Japan are measured from this point on Nihonbashi
©IIDj

Nihonbashi

Built in 1603 to commemorate the creation of the Tokugawa Shogunate, this bridge marks the central point of Japan, and all distances were – and still are – measured to and from here.

Once, all roads led to Kyoto, but under the Tokugawa, Edo became the new center. Giving a city a center was a novel concept, as previous East-Asian metropolises were grids.

Perhaps there was European influence. But whereas European cities are often built around a square, Edo focused on a bridge. This symbolized connectedness, and a return to unity after a century of civil war.

The present bridge is a beautiful early 20th century construction and one can see the zero-point brass marker right in the middle of the street.

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights

Museums



*The Lake and Mountain, Satake Shozan
courtesy of Akita Senshu Museum of Art*



*Akita Senshu Museum of Art
©Akita Senshu Museum of Art*

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Akita Senshu Museum of Art

Akita was a rich provincial city, ruled by the Satake daimyo family. As it produced copper, Japan's main export after silver was exhausted, the Akita samurai took an interest in foreign affairs. One daimyo, Satake Yoshiatsu was a keen artist, using the studio name *Shozan*.

Satake Shozan, learned to paint in the Western manner, known in Japanese as *Ranga*, where 蘭, *ran*, is a short for *Oranda* or Holland, and 画, *ga*, means *picture*.

The daimyo sponsored some of his retainers to study along with him, initiating what later became known as the *Akita Ranga School* of the 1780s. The artists were careful to avoid all subjects related to Christianity.



*Sendai City Museum
©Sendai City Museum*

Sendai City Museum

This fascinating museum houses works associated with the Date daimyo family, who settled here in the early 17th century. Interestingly, in 1613 the Date lord sent an embassy to Rome, but by the time it returned, Christianity had been proscribed. Many artifacts brought back were kept out of sight. Today several are on display here, next to artworks from the city's own rich and flourishing past and present.

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

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Museums



Paper fan with Uji Bridge by Ogata Korin, courtesy of Hosomi Museum



*Hosomi Museum
©Hosomi Museum*

Hosomi Museum

This private museum established by the art collector Hosomi Kokoan (1901-1979) is in central Kyoto. It exhibits an impressive collection of many types of Edo art, but best known are its works from the *Rinpa School*. Rinpa emerged in Kyoto in the early Edo Period with artists specialized in literary themes, such as depiction of poetic pillows, *utamakura*, and flowers associated with the Japanese verse tradition. Rinpa was patronised widely, and eventually it migrated to Edo, becoming a samurai art form.



*Woodblock print Up-to-date Teruuiji in an Old Picture at an Old Temple, Utagawa Kuniyoshi
courtesy of Hagi Uragami Museum*



*Hagi Uragami Museum
©Hagi Uragami Museum*

Hagi Uragami Museum

This prefectural art museum, designed by the world-famous Tange Kenzo, has an impressive collection in many fields, such as Japanese and other Asian ceramics. However, for samurai art, most important are the woodblock prints. Known as *ukiyo-e – pictures of the floating world* – these depict the urban delights of Edo. Edo was a disciplined place and social classes and genders were expected to keep apart. In the floating world of theatres and late-night drinking, however, freedoms were permitted.

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights



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Graduated from University of Oxford in Oriental Studies (Japanese) in 1985, Dr. Screech completed his PhD in Art History at Harvard University in 1991. He has since been at SOAS, while having served as a professor at the University of Chicago, and guest researcher at Gakushuin University and Waseda University in Tokyo.

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www.soas.ac.uk

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

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Places Akita Senshu Museum of Art

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Collection includes Akita Ranga painted by Shozan, the 8th daimyo lord of the Akita clan, and Odano Naotake, who was a samurai as well as a celebrated artist.

The exhibits changes several times a year. Prior inquiry is recommended when planning a visit.

010-0001 Akita shi, Nakadori 2-3-8

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Chishakuin Temple

Best known for its garden and wall paintings of the Hasegawa School, the present Chishakuin Temple was rebuilt at the end of the 36 Higashiyama mountain ridges in 1601. The temple storage, *syuzouko*, houses a wall painting of Hasegawa Tohaku and his son Kyuzo, a National Treasure. Reproductions are exhibited in the original site at the main viewing room, *shoin*, which also offers a magnificent view to the garden.

605-0951 Kyoto shi, Higashi yama ku, Higashi kawara machi 964

[web-site](#)

Dejima

An artificial island built in 1634 by local merchants for Portuguese traders. During *Sakoku*, the period of national seclusion (1641-1859), Dejima was the only trading post to allow diplomatic relation with the Dutch East India Company.

850-0862 Nagasaki shi, Dejima machi 6-1

[web-site](#)

Genkyu-En Garden

A daimyo garden to the northeast of Hikone Castle, laid out in 1677. The elegantly designed walking trails around the central pond are said to represent eight scenic views of the Omi and Xiaoxiang regions in China's Hunan Province.

522-0061 Shiga ken, Hikone shi, Konki cho 3

[web-site](#)

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

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Places **Hagi Uragami Museum**

The extensive collection of Oriental artwork donated by entrepreneur Uragami Toshihiro includes ukiyo-e woodblock prints by the renowned masters Utagawa Hiroshige, Katsushika Hokusai, Kitagawa Utamaro, and Toshusai Sharaku

758-0074 Yamaguchi ken, Hagi shi, Hiyako machi 586-1

[web-site](#)

Hikone Castle

Located on the shore of Biwako lake, Hikone Castle was built after the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 under the direction of li Naotaka, the second lord of Hikone. The castle survived many wars and natural disasters, and is today one of the few castles in Japan that retains its original structure.

522-0061 Shiga ken, Hikone shi, Konkicho 1-1

Hikone Castle Museum

Formerly known as *Omote Goten*, the facility was used as the front building of Hikone Castle and the li family's administrative headquarters during Edo period. The building was demolished on the demise of the Tokugawa shogunate and was reconstructed as a museum to house li family treasures, ranging from the notable blood-red armor to tea utensils, *Noh* costumes and calligraphy.

522-0061 Shiga ken, Hikone shi, Konkicho 1-1

[web-site](#)

Hosomi Museum

A private museum, best known for its fine collection of Rinpa school artwork. Exhibits range from Jomon period pieces to contemporary works. It is recommended to check the program when planning a visit.

606-8342 Kyoto shi, Sakyo ku, Okazaki, Saishoji cho 6-3

[web-site](#)

Kanayazaka at Old Tokaido Road

Kanaya was the 24th of 53 post stations on *Tokaido*, the East Sea Route, from Nihonbashi. In the 17th century, the Tokugawa government ordered the paving of the muddy road, but later modernization left only 30m of the original stone paving. In 1991 and 2001, the paving was reconstructed by local initiatives and is now 611m.

428-0023 Shizuoka ken, Shimada shi, Kanayasaka machi

[web-site](#)

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

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Places **Koishikawa Korakuen Garden**

Completed under the direction of Tokugawa Mitsukuni in the late 17th century, the layout of this strolling style garden, was influenced by the famous West Lake in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province in eastern China

112-0004 Tokyo, Bunkyo ku, Koraku 1-6-6

[web-site](#)

Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture

One of Japan's leading museums devoted to the history of overseas exchanges. It displays traded items, manuscripts, and various artworks from the Nagasaki area. Notable for a reconstructed magistrate's office, where short skits on Trials of the Edo period are performed on weekends.

850-0007 Nagasaki shi, Tateyama 1-1-1

[web-site](#)

Nihonbashi

Once providing views of Edo castle and Mt. Fuji, Nihonbashi became a symbol of connectedness and national unification after a century of civil war. The present bridge is a beautiful 20th century construction. The brass marker positioned in the middle of the road marks the reference point for all distance measurements in the country from Tokyo.

103-0027 Tokyo, Chuo ku, Nihonbashi 1 chome

[web-site](#)

Nikko Toshogu Shrine

A Shinto shrine established in 1617 to enshrine the deified spirit of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who brought social order and stability to Japan that lasted for over 260 years. The gorgeous, detailed decorations of the buildings, completed in just 17 months, represent the rich and sophisticated culture of the Edo period.

321-1431 Tochigi ken, Nikko shi, Sannai 2301

[web-site](#)

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

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Places **Sendai City Museum**

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The museum is home to the fine collection of the Date daimyo family. Pieces include artifacts associated with the embassy to Rome, armor and textiles owned by Date Masamune, furniture, textiles, ceramics, paintings, and manuscripts.

The exhibition changes quarterly. Prior inquiry is recommended.

980-0862 Miyagi ken, Sendai shi, Aoba ku, Kawauchi 26

[web-site](#)

Uji Bridge

Built in Uji, Kyoto, around 646 under direction of a Buddhist monk, Doto, the bridge became a popular subject in poems and literature. Historically it provided vital access to Kyoto. Having been destroyed and reconstructed numerous times, today's bridge is a reconstruction of 1996.

611-0021 Kyoto, Uji shi, Uji

[web-site](#)

Yatsushashi Iris Garden

Situated at Muryouji Temple in Chiryu, where home to the poetic pillow *Yatsushashi*, Eight Bridges. Although the original bridge and the irises had been gone, Yatsushashi Iris Garden, *Yatsushashi Kakitsubata Garden*, offers visitors with the view that once inspired poets and artists. Best visited while the Irises are in bloom, from late April through late May.

472-0001 Aichi-ken, Chiryu shi, Yatsushashi cho, Jinai 61-1

[web-site](#)

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights

Glossary **Akita Ranga School**

A school of Western-influenced Japanese painting of the 1870s, based in Kubota Domain (now Akita prefecture). It produced works on traditional Japanese themes and compositions using Western-style techniques.

- ▶ Odano Naotake (1749-1780)
- ▶ Ranga
- ▶ Satake Yoshiatsu (1748-1785)
- ▶ Shozan

[web-site](#)

Battle of Sekigahara

A decisive battle in 1600 which led to the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate. Sekigahara is located at the center of Japan in Fuwa district, Gifu prefecture.

- ▶ Ii Clan
- ▶ Tokugawa Clan
- ▶ Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616)

[web-site](#)

Biwako Lake

Japan's largest freshwater lake in Shiga prefecture. It flourished as a hub for water transport in medieval times and has served as a reservoir to Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe.

Daimyo

Feudal lords who gained power as large landowners emerged in the Heian Period (794-1185); their titles were abolished in the 19th century, following the Meiji restoration.

With the introduction of the feudal system during the Edo period, daimyo and their territories were reorganized and made subordinate to the Tokugawa shogunate.

- ▶ Date Clan
- ▶ Ii Clan
- ▶ Odano Naotake (1749-1780)
- ▶ Tokugawa Clan

Date Clan

A daimyo family that established itself in Sendai at the beginning of the Edo period

- ▶ Daimyo
- ▶ Edo Period (1603-1867)

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights

Glossary **Edo Period (1603-1867)**

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The period of the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate, over 250 years

Hasegawa School

A school of painting founded in the 16th century by Hasegawa Tohaku (1539-1610). A key representative work is the *Pine Trees* screen by Tohaku.

Hosomi Kokoan (1901-1979)

An Osaka industrialist who made a fortune in the wool business. He amassed a collection of over 1,000 works of Japanese art, which are now exhibited in the Hosomi Museum.

Ii Clan

A daimyo family that gained great power during the Edo period through their distinguished service to Tokugawa Shogunate since its establishment

- ▶ Battle of Sekigahara
- ▶ Daimyo
- ▶ Edo Period (1603-1867)
- ▶ Tokugawa Clan

Medicine Buddha

Buddha of healing and medicine, also known as Bhaishajyaguru. He cures dukkha (suffering) using the medicine of his teachings. Together with Shakyamuni and Amitabha Buddha, he forms the most important trinity of Buddhas.

Deified spirit of Ieyasu, after his death, was regarded as manifestation of Medicine Buddha.

Odano Naotake (1749-1780)

A retainer to Satake Yoshiatsu, the 8th daimyo of the Akita clan. Naotake was a celebrated artist who established Ranga, a painting style influenced by Western art techniques. He inspired other artists of the period, including Shozan (studio name of Satake Yoshiatsu).

- ▶ Akita Ranga School
- ▶ Ranga
- ▶ Satake Yoshiatsu (1748-1785)
- ▶ Shozan

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights

Glossary **Poetic Pillow**

In Japanese, *utamakura*, a category of words used in Japanese poetry. These are often place-names used in classical literature.

►Utamakura

Ranga

Literally Dutch, *ran*, painting, *ga*. A school of Japanese painting style influenced by western art techniques that introduced linear perspective and shading to traditional Japanese art.

►Akita Ranga School

Rinpa School

A school of Japanese painting founded in the 17th century which often takes its theme in evocative places referred in classic literature. Its most notable members are Hon'ami Koetsu (1558-1637), Tawaraya Sotatsu (d. c. 1643) and the brothers Ogata Korin (1658-1716) and Ogata Kenzan (1663-1743).

Samurai

Members of the warrior caste that ruled over Japan during from 1185 to 1867

►Shogun

Satake Yoshiatsu (1748-1785)

The 8th daimyo of the Akita clan. Also a noted Akita Ranga artist, known by his studio name *Shozan*. Yoshiatsu established Akita Ranga with his retainer Odano Naotake.

►Akita Ranga School

►Odano Naotake (1749-1780)

►Shozan

Shinto

Japan's traditional religion based on the worship of ancestral kami, deities, and nature spirits

Shogun

Military leaders of Japan from 1185 to 1868

►Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616)

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights

Glossary

Shozan

- ▶ Akita Ranga School
- ▶ Satake Yoshiatsu (1748-1785)

Tokaido

Literally the Eastern Sea Route. The most important route connecting Kyoto to Nihonbashi in the center of Edo in the Edo period. There were 53 government-approved post stations, or *shukuba*, along the route. Travelling the Tokaido was very popular, and became a favored theme in art and literature.

[web-site](#)

Tokugawa Clan

A powerful daimyo family that established the third shogunate in Edo, now Tokyo. Ruled Japan from 1603 to 1867

- ▶ Daimyo
- ▶ Edo Period (1603-1867)
- ▶ Samurai
- ▶ Shogun
- ▶ Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616)

Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616)

Founder of the Tokugawa shogunate which made Edo, the present Tokyo, the new center of Japan

- ▶ Edo Period (1603-1867)
- ▶ Tokugawa Clan
- ▶ Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628-1701)

Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628-1701)

Influential figure in the politics of the early Edo period; the second daimyo of the Mito Domain. Mitsukuni is grandson of Tokugawa Ieyasu.

- ▶ Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616)

Ukiyo-e

Literally Pictures of the Floating World. A genre that flourished during the Edo period.

- ▶ Edo Period (1603-1867)

Utamakura

- ▶ Poetic Pillow

Samurai Art of the Edo Period (1603-1867)

Enjoying Sites and Sights

Glossary **Yatsubashi**

Literally Eight Bridges. A poetic pillow word referring to a place originally located in Mikawa Province, now Aichi Prefecture.

▶ Poetic Pillow

▶ Utamakura

[web-site](#)

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