



Source: Utagawa Hiroshige II, *Zojoji Temple (Forty-eight Views of Famous Places in Edo, No. 33)* (Detail); Tokyo Metropolitan Library Collection

Edo **Architecture** Tourist Guide

— A Visitor's Guide to the Spirit of Tokyo —

During the entry of Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, in 1590 through the early 1600s, Edo grew into a political and cultural epicenter through active urban development. However, frequent fires plagued its dense districts, most notably the Great Fire of Meireki in 1657 which destroyed approximately 60% of the city. In response to this crisis, the shogunate implemented countermeasures such as creating *hiyokechi* (open lots to prevent the spread of fire) and widening main streets to facilitate evacuation in emergencies. As a result, Edo was transformed into a **fire-resistant city**. Even after the city became known as Tokyo, it continued to face disasters, including the fires of the Great Kanto Earthquake and the air raids of World War II. Consequently, **surviving structures** from the Edo period are rare and considered **extremely precious** today.

How Changing Lifestyles Transformed Architecture

Prolonged political stability and peace during the 260-year Edo period fostered a widespread sense of leisure, giving rise to a **vibrant culture of travel and sightseeing**. Influenced by this prosperity, temples and shrines—popular tourist destinations—grew increasingly grand and opulent. While more and more buildings with expensive *kawara-buki* (traditional tiled roofs) appeared in towns, this stood in **stark contrast** to the *nagaya* row houses (collective rental housing)



inhabited by the common people who could not afford such luxury. These *nagaya* featured fire-resistant roofs made by laying oyster shells, and later stones, over wooden shingles. That a single roof could reveal the **lifestyle and status** of its inhabitants is part of what makes **Edo architecture** so fascinating.

Surviving Beyond Disaster, Edo Architecture Endures



Source: Utagawa Hiroshige I, *Hakusan Keiseigakubo (Famous Restaurants of Edo)* (Detail); Tokyo Metropolitan Library Collection

Edo Architecture: A Sustainable Cycle of Timber Resources

Edo-period builders used highly advanced interlocking timber techniques to minimize the use of precious iron nails, preventing wood rot from rust. Minimizing the use of nails offered another key benefit, as buildings

could be easily dismantled, allowing the timber components to be reused with ease. In an era when harvesting timber required immense time and labor, people naturally practiced what we now call “sustainability.” This included valuing wood highly and planning for its reuse right from the construction phase.

1 Hino-shuku Honjin

Honjin were exclusive lodgings for daimyo and high-ranking officials, located at *shukuba* (post stations) along major highways. The *Honjin* in Hino (*Hino-shuku*) is particularly famous for its ties to Hijikata Toshizo, vice-commander of the *Shinsengumi*. Rebuilt in 1864, this structure offers a fascinating look at Edo-period architectural culture. The entire interior is open to the public, with rare artifacts from *Hino-shuku Honjin* also on display.



Photo credit: Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum

2 Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum

This expansive 7-hectare site features 30 historical structures from the Edo period to the mid-Showa era, all carefully relocated and restored for exhibition. The collection ranges from *Ome-kaido* inns and village leaders' (*nanushi*) farmhouses to the residences of *Hachioji Sennin Doshin* farmer-warriors, historic mausoleums, and the lively taverns where commoners once gathered. A captivating window into the **heart and soul of everyday life in Old Edo**.



3 Zojoji Temple

Zojoji Temple serves as the Tokugawa clan's funerary temple, the final resting place for six shoguns. Its cemetery is guarded by the **Inuki-mon Gate**, a masterpiece cast entirely from bronze. Replicating traditional wooden joinery in solid metal, this gate required extraordinary precision and represents the pinnacle of Edo-period engineering. It is a must-see marvel of historical craftsmanship.



4

Edo Castle Guardhouses

Bansho (guardhouses) were the duty stations for samurai tasked with security and surveillance. Found at key highway points and city borders, they were essential for protecting the Shogun at Edo Castle. Today, three remain within the Imperial Palace grounds: the **Hyakunin-bansho**, **Doshin-bansho**, and **O-bansho**. All are open to the public, offering a rare glimpse into the daily working life of the samurai class.



5

Yanesen

The Yanaka, Nezu, and Sendagi area, an acronym of which forms the name “**Yanesen**.” Relatively untouched by major earthquakes and war damage, this area still preserves its **old townscape** dating back to the late Edo era. With numerous temples and shrines centered around the temple town of Yanaka, as well as the former sites of *daimyo* residences, now parks and other public spaces, it's the perfect place to experience the lingering atmosphere of old Edo. The area can also be easily explored on foot.



6

Ichinoe Nanushi Yashiki

A complete estate featuring a storehouse, private forest, and moat, this residence of a *nanushi* (village headman) showcases the **surprising wealth of the farmer class**. Dating back to the mid-Edo period, the Tajima family residence features massive pillars, soaring ceilings, and a heavy thatched roof—extending over a traditional *engawa* veranda—that stand as a testament to the period's masterful craftsmanship.



Photo credit: Edogawa City Museum

From Edo to the Present.

A Map of Architectural Heritage

Tokyo's architecture is a gateway to its Edo past. Its presence can be felt in its famous sites, traditional houses, and historic streets. Here, we have selected several spots where the **atmosphere of Edo** can still be felt today.



Edo's Architectural DNA

Edo architecture has been preserved through traditional restoration and official heritage designations, often serving as local guardians and community icons. The **Bunkyo and Taito areas**, largely spared from fire and war damage, remain home to precious Edo-period structures. Rich in historic shrines and temples, these preserved neighborhoods retain an authentic Edo-period atmosphere, perfect for a relaxing historical walk.



1:00 PM-1:10 PM

Kannon-ji Temple's Tsuji-Bei Wall

Built near the end of the Edo period, this southern wall retains its original character through meticulous restoration with authentic materials. This *tsuji-bei* (earthen wall) features a stone foundation, weather-shielding tiles, and a packed-earth core, all finished in white plaster that radiates a soulful, historic patina.



Facility Information

03-3821-4053

5-8-28 Yanaka, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-0001



1:20 PM-1:40 PM

Old Yoshidaya Sakayaten



In operation for generations from the Edo period until 1986, "Yoshidaya" is a historic liquor shop now open as a public museum. It's a fascinating example of **Edo-period merchant architecture**, featuring dashigeta (projecting girders) that support the long hisashi (eaves), and the agedo (lift-up lattice doors) that lift up to open the storefront. Frozen in time, the interior offers an intimate glimpse into the daily life of a merchant family.

Facility Information

03-3823-4408

2-10-6 Uenosakuragi, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-0002

Closed: Mondays (Open if Monday is a holiday, closed the following day), New Year Holidays (Dec. 29 – Jan. 3).

9:30 AM to 4:30 PM

2:00 PM-2:40 PM 

Nezu-jinja Shrine

Commissioned in Hoen 3 (1706) by Shogun Tsunayoshi, this shrine is a magnificent example of **Gongen-zukuri architecture**, celebrated for its opulent craftsmanship. Many of its structures survive today, including the Honden, Heiden, Haiden, Karamon Gate, West Gate, Sukibei, and Romon, all designated as Important Cultural Properties. The shrine is also renowned for the approximately 3,000 azaleas that blanket its grounds.

Facility Information

03-3822-0753

1-28-9 Nezu, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0031

Karamon Gate Hours: Jan, Nov, Dec: 6:00 AM – 5:00 PM | Feb: 6:00 AM – 5:30 PM | Mar: 6:00 AM – 6:00 PM | Apr, May, Sep: 5:30 AM – 6:00 PM | Jun, Jul, Aug: 5:00 AM – 6:00 PM | Oct: 5:30 AM – 5:30 PM



 3:10 PM-3:20 PM

Kuromon | The Black Gate (Tokyo National Museum)

A peer to the famous University of Tokyo's "Red Gate," this late-Edo period structure served as the grand entrance to the family estate of the Ikeda clan of the Tottori Domain. As its name "Black Gate" suggests, it is a **massive, jet-black structure**, featuring an irimoya roof and a guardhouse with ornate karahafu gables. Now located on the Tokyo National Museum grounds, its grand scale and high-ranking status make it a must-see.

Facility Information (Tokyo National Museum)

050-5541-8600 (Hello Dial) / 13-9 Ueno Park, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-8712 / Closed: Mondays (Open if Monday is a holiday, closed the following day), New Year Holidays / *Subject to temporary closures and special openings / Hours: 9:30 AM to 5:00 PM (until 8:00 PM on Fridays, Saturdays, and on Sundays preceding a national holiday). Last admission is 30 minutes before closing. / *Please check for specific dates and hours during the year-end and New Year holidays."



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3:30 PM-4:00 PM 

Kyu-Kaneiji Five-Storeyed Pagoda

Built in 1631, destroyed by fire in 1639 and rebuilt that same year, this pagoda stands 36 meters tall, measuring to the hoju (sacred gem finial) at its peak. Only the uppermost roof is copper-plated, while the others are finished in traditional tile. As a **designated Important Cultural Property**, it remains a quintessential example of early Edo-period style, leaving a powerful impression with its majestic presence.

Facility Information (in Ueno Zoological Gardens)

03-3828-5171 / 9-83 Ueno Park, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-8711 / Closed: Mondays (Open if Monday is a holiday, closed the following day), New Year Holidays (Dec. 29 – Jan. 1). / *Subject to closure on select Mondays; please refer to the official calendar for details. / 9:30 AM to 5:00 PM (Last admission at 4:00 PM)





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EDO-TOKYO OPEN AIR
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<https://www.tatemonoen.jp/english/>



[Journey Through Edo's Legacy]
100 Selected sites to explore Edo history and culture
across Japan
<https://edolegacytravel.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/>



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