



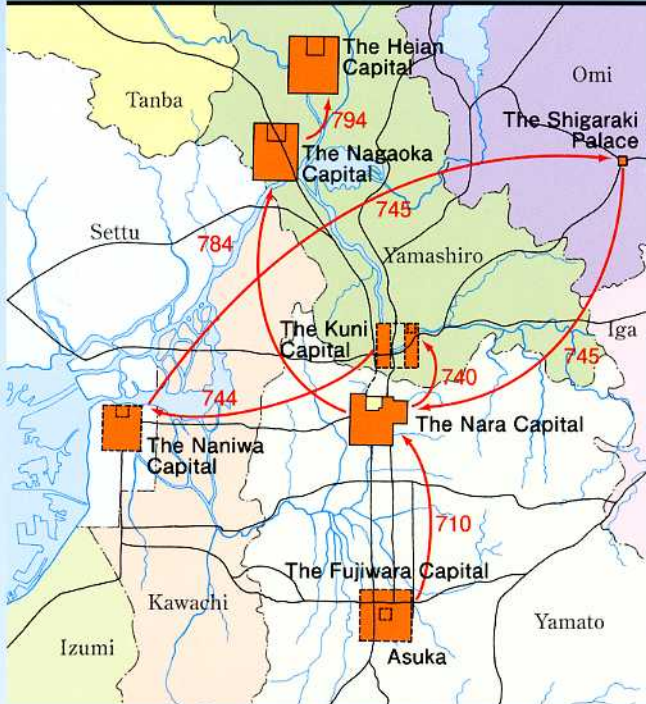
World Cultural Heritage

NARA PALACE SITE

平城宮跡

Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties

The Nara Capital and Palace

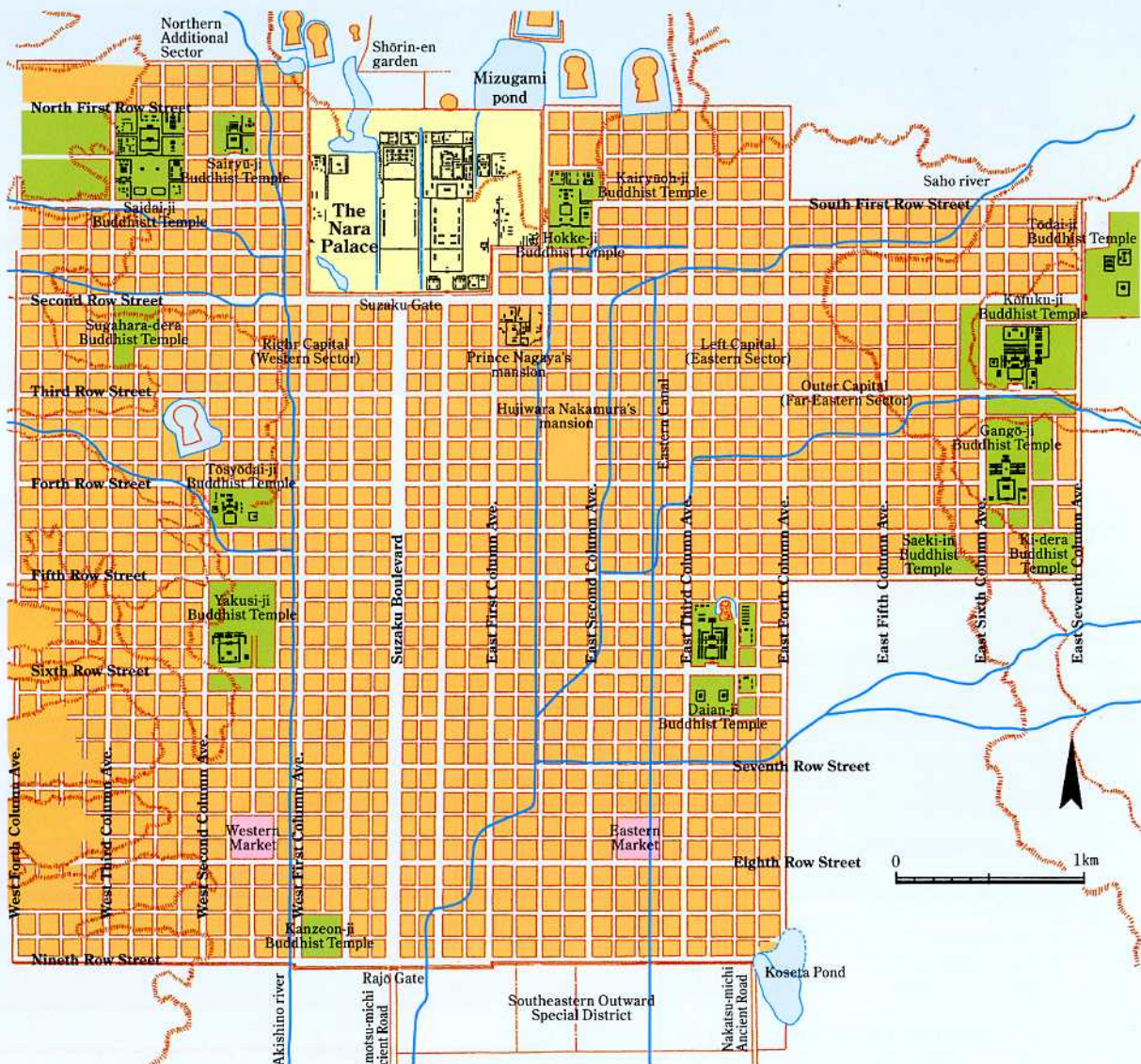


Frequent relocations of the eighth century capital

The Nara Capital

Built at the northern edge of the Nara basin, Nara was designated the seat of government in the year 710 A.D. Empress Gemmei chose it as the center from which to rule in accordance with the Ritsuryō legal code, moving the capital from the old site of Fujiwara, near Asuka. The construction of a capital modeled after cities like the Tang Chinese capital Chang-an was also a significant expression of national prestige within the contemporary East Asian context. Emperor Shōmu later moved the capital repeatedly beginning in 740, but again made Nara the capital in 745. From then until the move to Nagaoka in 784, the Nara region flourished as the capital site. The span covered by these events is called the Nara period.

The main street of the Nara Capital was Suzaku Boulevard, approximately 75 meters wide and extending north in a straight line from the Rajō Gate, the capital's southern entrance. Divided by Suzaku Boulevard, the western part of the city was called the Right Capital, and the eastern part the Left Capital. The Left Capital had an extension toward the east on its northern half. The capital was divided in regular fashion into residential blocks by large and small streets intersecting at right angles in the form of a checkerboard. The residents of the Nara Capital are numbered from between forty or fifty thousand to one hundred thousand, with the Emperor and members of the imperial and other aristocratic families being a small minority on the order of one hundred plus several tens of persons, and the vast majority made up of lower officials and commoners.



City street grid of the Nara Capital

The Nara Palace

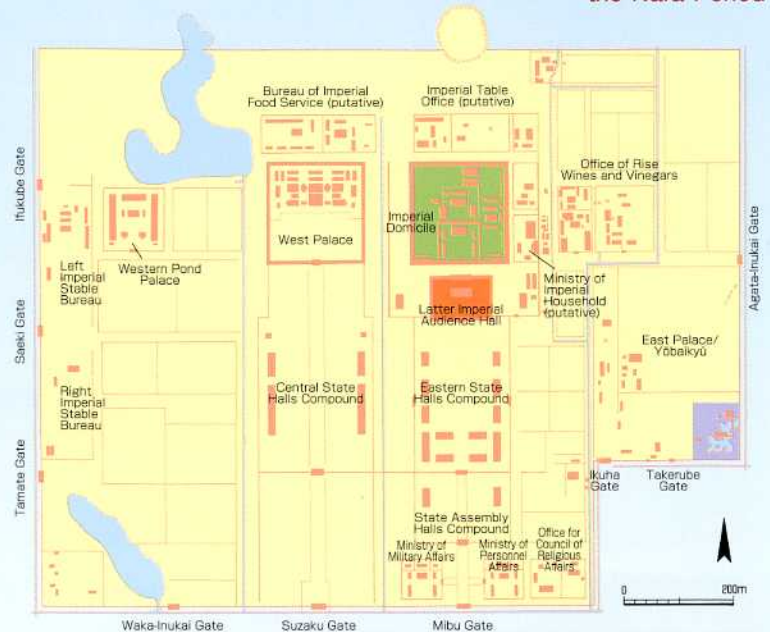
At the northern end of Suzaku (Scarlet Phoenix) Boulevard rose the Suzaku Gate. Through it lay the Nara Palace, measuring approximately one by one kilometer. Encircling the palace grounds was a great earthen wall with twelve gates, including the Suzaku Gate.

The interior of the Nara Palace divided into a number of precincts. These include the Imperial Audience Hall and the State Halls Compounds that served as locus for politics and national ceremonies, the Imperial Domicile where the Emperor resided, the quarters where the daily business of government was conducted, gardens where banquets were held, and so forth. Among these, the settings for politics and ceremonies underwent a great change from the earlier to the latter parts of the Nara period, divided by a brief span in which the capital moved elsewhere. The Imperial Audience Hall, which stood directly north from Suzaku Gate in the earlier part of the Nara period (generally referred to as the Former Imperial Audience Hall), was built anew in the precinct to the east in the latter part of the period (the Latter Imperial Audience Hall). By contrast, the Imperial Domicile was located at the same place throughout the Nara period.

These matters have been learned through more than fifty years of archaeological excavations. Among the results, the understanding that the palace precinct, formerly thought to have been nearly a perfect square, in fact had an extension along its eastern side, and the further discovery of a Nara period garden in one corner of this extension, can be counted as significant findings of archaeological investigation.



Nara Palace in the earlier part of the Nara Period



Nara Palace in the latter part of the Nara Period



The reconstructed Suzaku Gate
This was the main gate of the Nara Palace, opening directly onto Suzaku Boulevard. In addition to ceremonies held at New Year's and for receiving and sending off foreign envoys, events such as the gathering of young men and women of the capital to exchange love poems under the Emperor's gaze were also conducted here.

A look inside the Nara Palace



Remains of the East Tower, Former Imperial Audience Hall Compound

These remains are of an unusual building in which pillars embedded in postholes and those standing atop foundation stones were used in mixed fashion, thought to be have been a multi-storied structure from the large size of the post holes. The largest posts (approximately 75 cm in diameter) at the Nara Palace site were found here.

Reconstruction of the Ministry of Military Affairs

This was the office in charge of military personnel. Although a modern road cuts through the center of the compound, representations of the pillars and walls of the buildings have been built to a height of about one meter, thereby using a method of partial reconstruction for displaying the site.



Reconstruction of the East Palace Garden

This replicates the setting used for banquets by Emperors and aristocrats. The buildings have been reconstructed based upon studies of the remains, while the actual stone work and other garden features that were found are incorporated into the display.

East Palace Garden excavation

The remains of this Nara period garden were excavated in the southeast corner of the Nara Palace. In addition to the buildings and bridges around the pond, the stone paving lining the pond bottom, and a magnificent stone arrangement in the hill garden style, including a standing stone 1.2 m tall, were discovered.



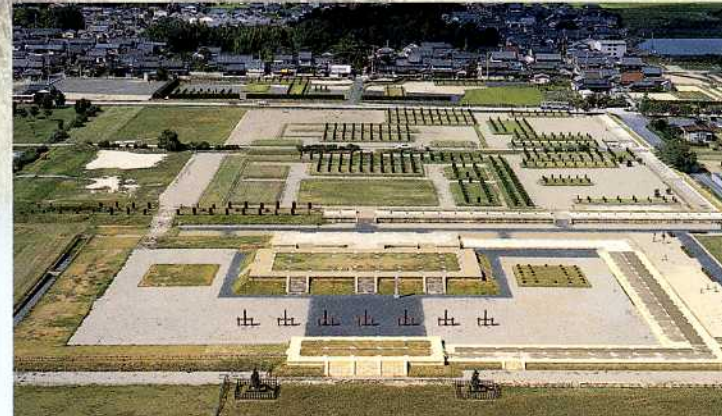
Latter Imperial Audience Hall remains

This location was thought from the Meiji period to be the remains of the Imperial Audience Hall on the basis of its name, "Daikoku (change phonologically from Daigoku) no shiba" (Great Audience grounds). Excavations were conducted here in 1978.



Reconstruction of the Latter Imperial Audience Hall and Imperial Domicile

For the Latter Audience Hall and surrounding buildings, podiums have been reconstructed for those structures with posts supported by foundation stones, and for buildings with pillars embedded in postholes, the location of the posts are indicated by shrubs cropped in cylindrical shapes.



Well of the Office of Rice Wines and Vinegars

This well, located at the government office that made rice wines for the Emperor and other officials, was covered with a hexagonal roof. The stump of one post and holes dug for five others to support the roof may be discerned in the photograph.



Brief chronological table of the Nara Palace

- 694 Capital moved to Fujiwara
- 701 Taihō Ritsuryō legal code put into effect
- 707 Empress Gemmei enthroned
- 708 Wadō-Kaichin copper coins minted
- 710 Capital moved to Nara
- 715 Empress Genshō enthroned
- 724 Emperor Shōmu enthroned
- 729 Prince Nagaya incident (forced suicide)
- 740 Capital moved to Kuni on outbreak of Fujiwara no Hirotsugu's rebellion
- 742 Construction of Shigaraki Palace
- 744 Capital moved to Naniwa
- 745 Capital moved to Shigaraki, then back to Nara
- 749 Empress Kōken enthroned
- 752 Completion ceremony of the Great Buddha at Todaiji
- 758 Emperor Junnin enthroned
- 764 Fujiwara no Nakamaro's rebellion
- Empress Kōken enthroned again as Empress Shōtoku
- 770 Emperor Konin (descendant of Emperor Tenchi) enthroned
- 784 Capital moved to Nagaoka
- 810 Retired Emperor Heizei plots a return of the capital to Nara but fails (Kusuko incident)
- 864 By the time, the old streets of the Nara Capital have converted to paddy



A 1/100 scale model of the Former Imperial Audience Hall Compound (made in 1993)

The Imperial Audience Hall is where a seat was placed for the Emperor at ceremonies of state, such as the imperial ascension and the annual greetings held on New Year's Day. The main gate of the cloister surrounding it opened through multiple doors, and on both sides of it there were structures thought to be multi-storied, called the East and West Towers. Retainers stood in line in the plaza before the Hall to pay obeisance to the Emperor.

※The mark in the text is a 1/4 scale motif based on a belt ornament recovered from the remains of the Sairyūji temple in the Nara Capital

Artifacts tell the work of the residents

Construction of the Nara Palace

There were many buildings at the Nara palace, and its construction required vast amounts of materials. Many items used for construction such as roof tiles, lumber, and stones, have been found through excavation. These unearthed items not only provide clues for inferring the shapes of the buildings, but also serve as data for examining the way in which such materials were obtained.



Demon tiles
These tiles, which covered the ends of ridge beams (main and sloping), were meant to ward off evil. In addition to those with the faces of beasts, there are examples having a phoenix pattern.



Daily lives of the people

For the Emperor, aristocrats, and lower officials to live at the capital, provisions needed for daily life had to be brought from the provinces in the form of taxes and so on. Among the unearthed artifacts are items like pottery, which can be recognized as originating from locations throughout the country. Mokkan (wooden tablets for writing) used as shipping tags are well suited as clues for learning what items were brought from which provinces to the capital.



An official's work desk

In addition to ink, brush, grinding ware, and water holder, a knife (for shaving the surface of a mokkan to make corrections) and other items were used.



Eating and kitchen utensils

In addition to chopsticks and spoons, eating vessels such as bowls and plates, storage vessels such as jars and vases, and cooking equipment such as ladders are recovered.

① Shipping tag for bonito brought from the province of Izu

② Shipping tag for abalone taken to the mansion of Prince Nagaya

③ Summons to a worker issued by the Office of Rice Wines and Vinegars

Various mokkan



Officials' duties

Many government offices from the Grand Council of Administration on down were established under the Ritsuryō legal code. Daily business was conducted at these offices much as in the present time, through processing documents. In addition to paper, wooden tablets (mokkan) were frequently used for making documents and keeping accounts, and many of these mokkan are recovered during excavations.

※ Illustrated by Hayakawa Kazuko

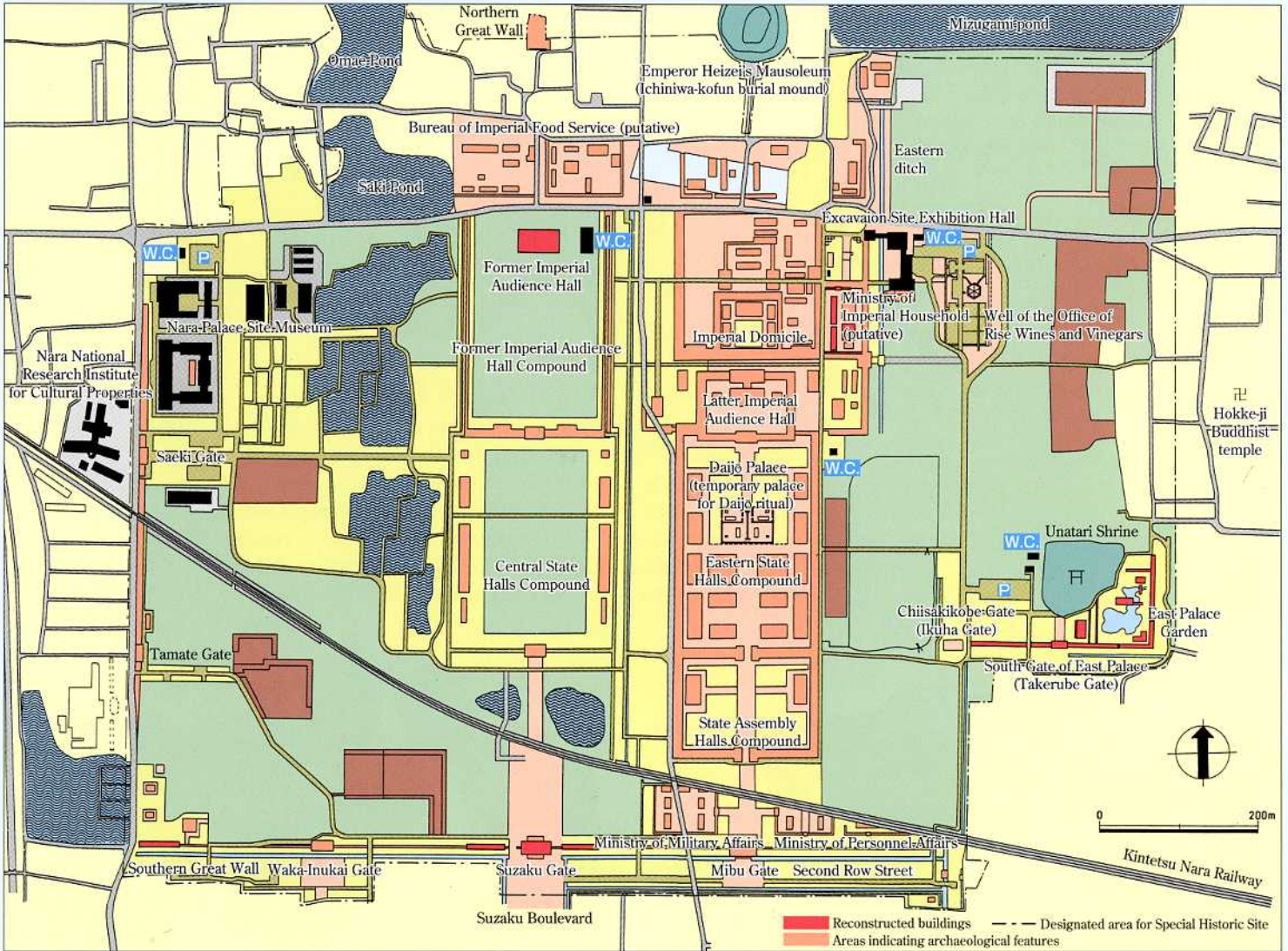


The Nara Palace Site Museum

Explanations of the Nara Palace are made readily understandable through displays of various artifacts recovered from the excavations, along with models of reconstructed palace buildings.

Excavation Site Exhibition Hall

In addition to the structural features of the site being visible just as they were found through excavation, models of reconstructions of the Latter Imperial Audience Hall's roof and the Imperial Domicile are on display.



Nara Palace Site

Guide to the Nara Palace Site

Nara Palace Site Museum

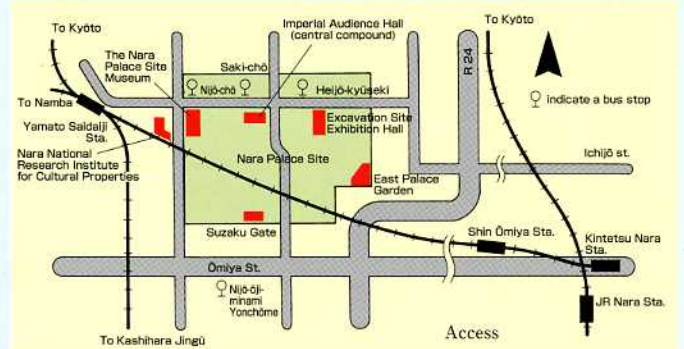
Ten minutes walk from Yamato Saidaiji station of Kintetsu Railway.

Excavation Site Exhibition Hall

Take a bus to Kintetsu Yamato Saidaiji station from Nara station of JR or Kintetsu, or a bus to JR Nara station from Kintetsu Yamato Saidaiji station, and get off at Heijō-kyūseki bus stop.

East Palace Garden Suzaku Gate

Ten minutes walk from Heijō-kyūseki bus stop
Twenty minutes walk from Yamato Saidaiji station of Kintetsu Railway.
Or, twenty minutes walk from Heijō-kyūseki bus stop.
Or, take a bus from JR Nara station and Kintetsu Nara station and get off at Nijo-Oji Minami-Nichōme bus stop, and walk for three minutes.



Admissions/Hours (all facilities above)

Free Admission

Open daily 9:00-16:30 (last admission 16:00)

Closed on Monday (except for National Holidays on Monday, in which case the museum is open on the holiday and closed the following Tuesday instead) and year-end holidays.

World Cultural Heritage Nara Palace Site

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