Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress and the Imperial Family

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

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※ NB: This material provides basic information about the Imperial Family, which helps foreign readers understand the role and the activities of the Imperial Family of Japan.

Cover Photo: Nijubashi Bridges spanning the moat of the Imperial Palace, Tokyo

1. The Emperor and the Imperial Family

● The Emperor

【Position】

1 The Emperor is the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power (the Constitution of Japan, Article 1).

2 The Imperial Throne is dynastic and succeeded to in accordance with the Imperial House Law passed by the Diet (Constitution, Article 2).

【Powers】

1 The Emperor performs only such acts in matters of state as are provided for in the Constitution, and has no powers related to government (Constitution, Article 4(1)).

2 The Emperor's acts in matters of State (Constitution, Articles 6, Article 7, and Article 4(2)).

(1) Appointment of the Prime Minister as designated by the Diet
(2) Appointment of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court as designated by the Cabinet
(3) Promulgation of amendments of the Constitution, laws, cabinet orders, and treaties
(4) Convocation of the Diet
(5) Dissolution of the House of Representatives
(6) Proclamation of general election of members of the Diet
(7) Attestation of the appointment and dismissal of Ministers of State and other officials as provided for by law, and of full powers and credentials of Ambassadors and Ministers
(8) Attestation of general and special amnesty, commutation of punishment, reprieve, and restoration of rights
(9) Awarding of honors
(10) Attestation of instruments of ratification and other diplomatic documents as provided for by law
(11) Receiving foreign ambassadors and ministers
(12) Performance of ceremonial functions
(13) Delegation of the Emperor's acts on matters of State

3 The advice and approval of the Cabinet is required for all acts of the Emperor in matters of State, and the Cabinet is responsible for them (Constitution, Article 3).

Opening remarks by His Majesty the Emperor at the Diet

● The Imperial Family

The Empress, the Grand Empress Dowager, the Empress Dowager, Shinno (Princes) and their consorts of Shinno, Naishinno (Princesses), O (Princes) and their consorts of O, and Jo-o (Princesses) are members of the Imperial Family (Imperial House Law, Article 5).

The legitimate children of an Emperor and the legitimate grandchildren of an Emperor in the male line are Shinno (Princes) in the case of males and Naishinno (Princesses) in the case of females. The legitimate descendants of an Emperor in the third and later generations in the male line are O (Princes) in the case of males and Jo-o (Princesses) in the case of females (Imperial House Law, Article 6).

From Left, Her Majesty the Empress Emerita, Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako of Akishino, His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus, Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko, His Majesty the Emperor, Her Majesty the Empress, His Imperial Highness Prince Hisahito of Akishino, His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino, Her Imperial Highness Princess Kako of Akishino and Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino

2. Personal Histories

● Personal Histories of Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress

【His Majesty the Emperor (The 126th Emperor)】

Name: Naruhito
Lineage: Eldest Son of His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus
Date of Birth: February 23, 1960
The Personal Title for Young Members (Been conferred in accordance with the Imperial Family's tradition of appellation): Prince Hiro(Hiro-no-Miya)
Honorary Positions: Honorary President of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games
Coming of Age Ceremony: February 23, 1980 (at the age of 20)
Investiture as Crown Prince: February 23, 1991
Accession to the Throne: May 1, 2019
Enthronement Ceremony: October 22, 2019
Education: 1982 - Graduated from the Department of History in the Faculty of Letters of Gakushuin University
1983-1985 - Studied abroad at Merton College, University of Oxford, UK
1988 - Completed first part of doctorate at the Graduate School of Humanities of Gakushuin University

【Her Majesty the Empress】

Name: Masako
Lineage: Eldest Daughter of Mr. OWADA Hisashi
Date of Birth: December 9, 1963
Honorary Position: Honorary President of the Japanese Red Cross Society
Education and career
1985 - Graduated from the Faculty of Economics of Harvard University, USA
1987 - Left Tokyo University
1987 - Entered Ministry of Foreign Affairs
1988-1990 - Studied abroad at Balliol College, University of Oxford, UK
1993 - Resigned the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

【Marriage】

Imperial House Council: January 19 1993
Engagement Ceremony (Nosai no Gi):
April 12 1993
Marriage: June 9 1993

At the wedding parade (1993) (photo by Kyodo Press)

【Children】

- Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko
- **Date of Birth :** December 1, 2001
- **The Personal Title for Young Members :**
  Princess Toshi (Toshi-no-Miya)
- Studying at the Department of Japanese Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Gakushuin University

Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress

Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko

【His Majesty's Research, etc.】

While he was the Crown Prince, from April 1992 until March 2019, His Majesty served as a visiting research fellow at the Gakushuin University Museum of History, where he continued his research on Japanese medieval history. In 2003, he gave a lecture at the Gakushuin Women's College entitled, "British Society and Culture: The Source of North American Culture,"; he also gave lectures on various themes almost every year, in 2005, 2006, from 2008 to 2017, and in 2019.

With regard to water issues, in March 2003, in his capacity as Honorary President of the 3rd World Water Forum, His Majesty delivered a memorial speech at the opening ceremony of the Forum entitled, "Waterways Connecting Kyoto and Local Regions - Focusing on Ancient and Medieval Water Transport on Lake Biwa and Yodo River -". On the occasion of his visit to Mexico in March 2006, His Majesty delivered the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the 4th World Water Forum entitled, "Edo and Water Transport". In December 2007, His Majesty delivered the commemorative lecture at the opening ceremony of the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit, entitled "Humans and Water: From Japan to the Asia-Pacific Region". In July 2008, on the occasion of his visit to Spain, His Majesty delivered a special lecture entitled "Living with Water - Human Ingenuity and Wisdom" at the "Water Tribune" Symposium of the 2008 Zaragoza International Exposition. In March 2009, on the occasion of his visit to Turkey, His Majesty delivered a keynote speech entitled "Interacting with Water - Close Ties between Humans and Water" at the 5th World Water Forum. In March 2012, at the 6th World Water Forum held in France, a video message from His Majesty was broadcast, entitled "Water and Disaster: Learning from the History of Tsunamis" In March 2013, at the United Nations Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters in the United States of America, His Majesty delivered a keynote address entitled "Revisiting the History of Interaction Between Human Beings and Water-related Disasters: Exploration to Find a Hint for a More Disaster-resilient Society". In April 2015, at the 7th World Water Forum in the Republic of Korea, His Majesty delivered a video message entitled "Fulfilling People`s Aspirations on Water-The Relation between Water and People through Science and Technology-". In November 2015, at the United Nations Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters in the United States of America, His Majesty gave a keynote lecture entitled "Quest for Better Relations Between People and Water".

His Majesty's speech at the 8th World Water Forum in Brazil (2018)
(photo by Kyodo Press)

In July 2017, at the United Nations Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters in the United States of America, His Majesty sent a video message entitled "Working with Water". In March 2018, His Majesty gave a keynote lecture titled "Water to Bring About Prosperity, Peace and Happiness" to the High Level Panel on Water and Disasters at the 8th World Water Forum in Brazil. In April 2019 an anthology of His Majesty's speeches on water-related issues was published, entitled "Speeches on Water Issues."

In addition, the fruits of His Majesty's studies in the United Kingdom culminated in an English paper, "The Thames as Highway," which was published in April 1989. In September 1991 he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Law from the University of Oxford.

- His Majesty is a sportsman and music lover, being an avid tennis player and also enjoying mountaineering, skiing and jogging. He is an accomplished violist.
- Her Majesty is also a sports and music lover, in particular tennis and skiing.

● Personal Histories of the Imperial Family

【His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus (the 125th Emperor)】

Name: Akihito
Born: December 23, 1933, as the eldest son of the late Emperor Showa
Coming of Age Ceremony and Investiture as Crown Prince, at the age of 18, conducted at the Imperial Palace, Tokyo: November 1952
The Personal Title for Young Members (Been conferred in accordance with the Imperial Family's tradition of appellation): Prince Tsugu (Tsugu-no-Miya)
Accession to the Throne: January 7, 1989
Enthronement Ceremony: November 12, 1990
Ceremony of the Abdication: April 30, 2019
Abdication from the Throne: April 30, 2019
Education: Finished education at Gakushuin University, 1956.

- In June 1953, His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus, the then Crown Prince, representing Japan at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, made his first overseas trip. On this trip he travelled to 13 other countries in Europe and North America.
- Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita have visited 58 countries in more than fifty years since their marriage in 1959.
- On November 12, 1990, the Enthronement Ceremony was held at the Imperial Palace, Tokyo, attended, from abroad, by dignitaries from 158 countries, including Monarchs and Heads of State and two international organizations.

【Her Majesty the Empress Emerita】

Name: Michiko
Born: October 20, 1934, as the eldest daughter of SHODA Hidesaburo and Fumiko
Education: Graduated from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature in the Faculty of Literature at the University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo, 1957

【Marriage】

April 10, 1959

【Children】

1. His Majesty the Emperor, born February 23, 1960
2. His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino, born November 30, 1965
3. Her Imperial Highness Princess Sayako (now Mrs. KURODA Yoshiki), born April 18, 1969

Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita

【His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino】

Name: Fumihito
Lineage: Second Son of His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus
Date of Birth: November 30, 1965
The Personal Title for Young Members (Been conferred in accordance with the Imperial Family's tradition of appellation): Prince Aya (Aya-no-Miya)
Coming of Age Ceremony: November 30, 1985 (at the age of 20)
Education: 1988 - Graduated from the Department of Political Studies in the Faculty of Law of Gakushuin University
1988 - 1990 - Studied abroad at the Graduate School of Zoology, University of Oxford, UK
1996 - Granted Ph.D. from The Graduate University for Advanced Studies

【Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino】

Name: Kiko
Lineage: Eldest Daughter of Prof. KAWASHIMA Tatsuhiko
Date of Birth: September 11, 1966
Education: 1989 - Graduated from the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Letters of Gakushuin University
1995 - Completed first part of doctorate with a graduate course in psychology at the Graduate School of Humanities of Gakushuin University
2013 - Granted Ph.D. from the Graduate School of Humanities and Sciences, Ochanomizu University

Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino

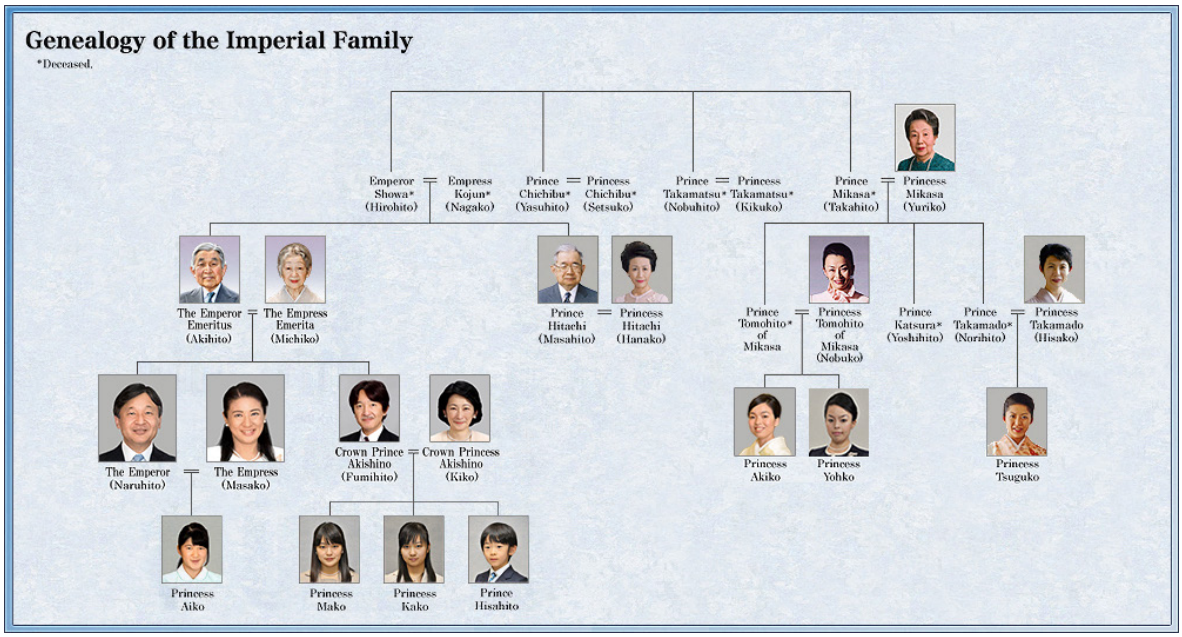
【Marriage】

Imperial House Council: September 12, 1989
Engagement Ceremony (Nosai no Gi): January 12, 1990
Marriage: June 29, 1990

【Children】

- **First Daughter**
  Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako
  Date of Birth: October 23, 1991
  2014 - Graduated from the Division of Arts and Sciences, the College of Liberal Arts, International Christian University.
  2016 - MA from the University of Leicester, UK
  Currently Her Imperial Highness is enrolled in the doctoral course (Ph.D.) in the division of Arts and Sciences, The International Christian University Graduate School.
- **Second Daughter**
  Her Imperial Highness Princess Kako
  Date of Birth: December 29, 1994
  2019 - Graduated from the Division of Arts and Sciences, College of Liberal Arts, International Christian University.
- **First Son**
  His Imperial Highness Prince Hisahito
  Date of Birth: September 6, 2006
  Currently His Imperial Highness is attending Ochanomizu University Junior High School.

From left, Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako of Akishino, His Imperial Highness Prince Hisahito of Akishino, His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino, Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino and Her Imperial Highness Princess Kako of Akishino



3.Ceremonies of the Accession to the Throne (From Heisei to Reiwa)

On May 1, 2019, His Majesty the Emperor acceded to the Throne, and the era name changed from Heisei to Reiwa. This marked the first imperial succession by abdication in approximately 200 years.

The most important ceremony of the Accession to the Throne is the Ceremony of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor at the Seiden (State Hall), in which His Majesty the Emperor proclaims his enthronement and receives felicitations from representatives in Japan and overseas.

Japanese and foreign guests were invited to the Ceremony of the Enthronement at the Seiden held on October 22, 2019. While heads of State, envoys, their spouses, and others from 160 countries and organizations attended the Heisei imperial succession, the Reiwa imperial succession was represented by 191 countries, organizations, and others. Foreign guests also attended the Court Banquet after the Ceremony of the Enthronement and the Banquet hosted by the Prime Minister and his spouse.

With many foreign dignitaries visiting Japan, the events offered an opportunity to acquaint a wider circle of people across the globe with the linkages between the Imperial Family and the world.

Ceremony for Inheriting the Imperial Regalia and Seals

Address by His Majesty the Emperor at First Audience after the Accession to the Throne

Address by His Majesty the Emperor on the Occasion of the Sokui-go-Choken-no-gi (First Audience after the Accession to the Throne) at the Seiden (State Hall), May 1, 1st Year of Reiwa (2019)

I have hereby succeeded to the Throne pursuant to the Constitution of Japan and the Special Measures Law on the Imperial House Law.
When I think about the important responsibility I have assumed, I am filled with a sense of solemnity.
Looking back, His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus, since acceding to the Throne, performed each of his duties in earnest for more than 30 years, while praying for world peace and the happiness of the people, and at all times sharing in the joys and sorrows of the people. He showed profound compassion through his own bearing. I would like to express my heartfelt respect and appreciation of the comportment shown by His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus as the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people of Japan.
In acceding to the Throne, I swear that I will reflect deeply on the course followed by His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus and bear in mind the path trodden by past emperors, and will devote myself to self-improvement. I also swear that I will act according to the Constitution and fulfill my responsibility as the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people of Japan, while always turning my thoughts to the people and standing with them. I sincerely pray for the happiness of the people and the further development of the nation as well as the peace of the world.

Address by His Majesty the Emperor at the Ceremony of the Enthronement at the State Hall (2019)

The Imperial Palace

Address by His Majesty at the Sokuirei-Seiden-no-gi (Ceremony of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor) at the Seiden (State Hall) , October 22, 1st Year of Reiwa (2019)

Having previously succeeded to the Imperial Throne in accordance with the Constitution of Japan and the Special Measures Law on the Imperial House Law, I now perform the Ceremony of Enthronement at the Seiden State Hall and proclaim my enthronement to those at home and abroad.
I deeply reflect anew that for more than 30 years on the Throne, His Majesty the Emperor Emeritus constantly prayed for the happiness of the people and world peace, always sharing in the joys and sorrows of the people, and showing compassion through his own bearing. I pledge hereby that I shall act according to the Constitution and fulfill my responsibility as the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people of Japan, while always wishing for the happiness of the people and the peace of the world, turning my thoughts to the people and standing by them.
I sincerely hope that our country, through our people's wisdom and unceasing efforts, achieves further development and contributes to the friendship and peace of the international community and the welfare and prosperity of humankind.

Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress viewing the National Celebration of His Majesty the Emperor 's Accession to the Throne (2019)

● Ceremonies for Proclamation of Crown Prince

One year after the Ceremonies of Accession to the Throne of His Majesty, the 126th Emperor, the Ceremonies for Proclamation of Crown Prince were held at the Seiden(State Hall) of the Imperial Palace on November 8, 2020 (2nd year of Reiwa).

● Rikkoshi-Senmei-no-gi (Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince)

【Address by His Majesty the Emperor】

Today, I hereby perform the Rikkoshi-Senmei-no-gi, Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince, in accordance with the Imperial Household Law, and proclaim to those at home and abroad that Prince Akishino is Crown Prince.

【Address by His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino】

I am filled with the deepest awe and gratitude at being proclaimed the Imperial Heir, Crown Prince, at this Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince.

I will discharge my duties solemnly bearing in mind my responsibilities as Crown Prince.

● Choken-no-gi (First Audience)

【Address by His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino】

I am filled with the deepest awe and gratitude at having been proclaimed the Imperial Heir, Crown Prince, today at the Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince.

I will continue to discharge my duties to the best of my ability now that I have been proclaimed the Imperial Heir, Crown Prince.

I wish here to express most respectfully my humblest gratitude.

【Address by His Majesty the Empreror】

It gives me great joy that the Rikkoshi-Senmei-no-gi, Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince was performed today.

It is my hope that you will meet the expectations of the people and successfully fulfill the duties as Crown Prince, fully drawing on what you have cultivated.

His Majesty the Emperor (Brown Costume) and His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino (Orange Costume)

First Audience

Glossary of Ceremonies

▪ **Ceremony of the Abdication from the Throne**

April 30, 2019: Taiirei-Seiden-no-gi: Ceremony of the Abdication of His Majesty the Emperor at the Seiden (State Hall)

Ceremony to announce the abdication to the people and for the Emperor to receive in audience the representatives of the people for the last time before the abdication.

▪ **Ceremonies and Event related to the Accession to the Throne**

May 1, 2019: Kenji-to-Shokei-no-gi: Ceremony for Inheriting the Imperial Regalia and Seals

Ceremony for the Emperor to inherit the Imperial Regalia (Sword and Jewel), which are treasures inherited together with the throne, as well as the State and Privy Seals, as proof of his accession to the throne.

May 1, 2019: Sokui-go-Choken-no-gi: First Audience after the Accession to the Throne

Ceremony for the Emperor to receive in audience the representatives of the people for the first time after the accession to the throne.

October 22, 2019: Sokuirei-Seiden-no-gi: Ceremony of the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor at the Seiden (State Hall)

Ceremony to proclaim the enthronement and to receive felicitations from representatives from home and abroad.

October 22, 25, 29 and 31, 2019: Kyoen-no-gi: Court Banquets after the Ceremony of the Enthronement

Court banquets to celebrate the enthronement and receive the congratulations of the guests.

October 23, 2019: Naikaku-Soridaijin-Fusai-Shusai-Bansankai: Banquet hosted by Prime Minister and his spouse

Banquet for foreign heads of State, royals, prime ministers and other representatives, etc.

Nobember 10, 2019: Shukuga-Onretsu-no-gi: Imperial Procession by motorcar after the Ceremony of the Enthronement

Procession to show the new Emperor to the people after the Enthronement Ceremony and to receive their good wishes.

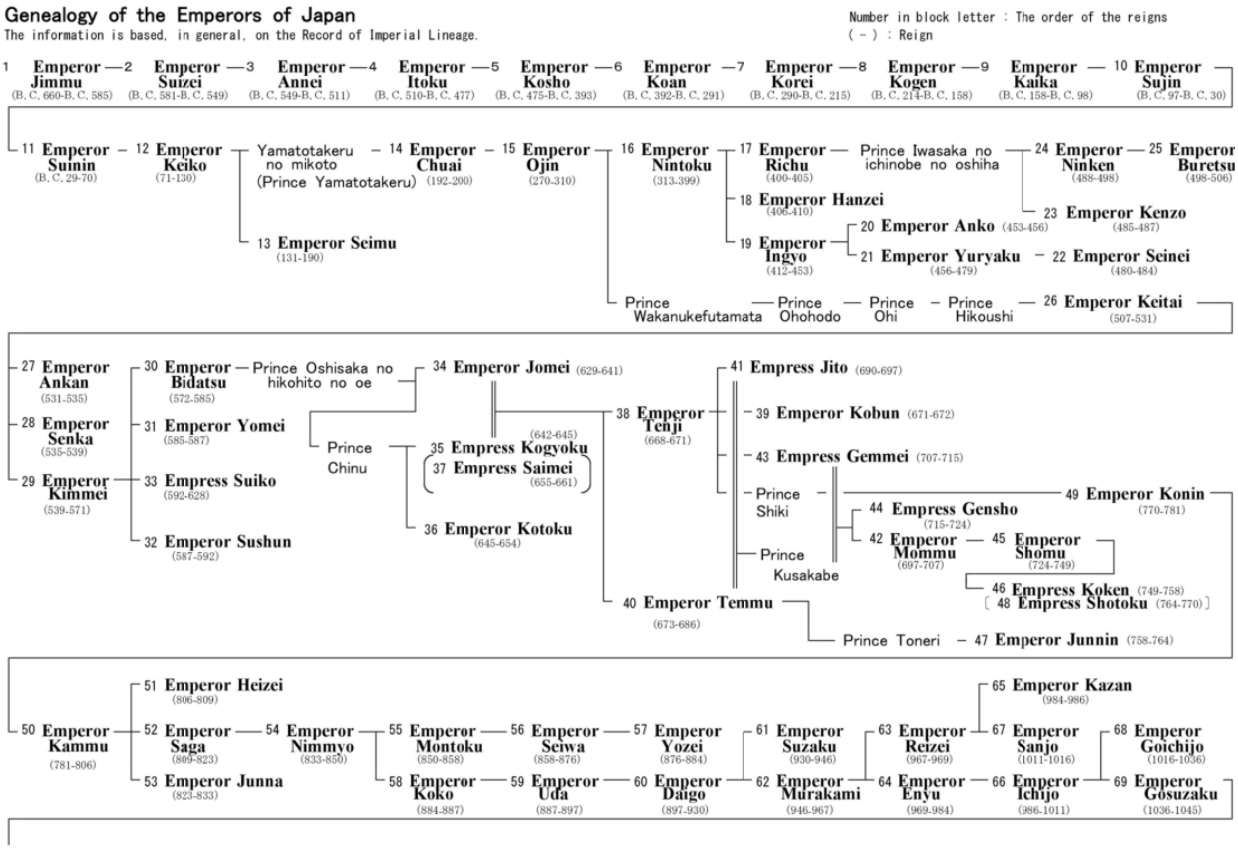
- **Ceremonies for Proclamation of Crown Prince**

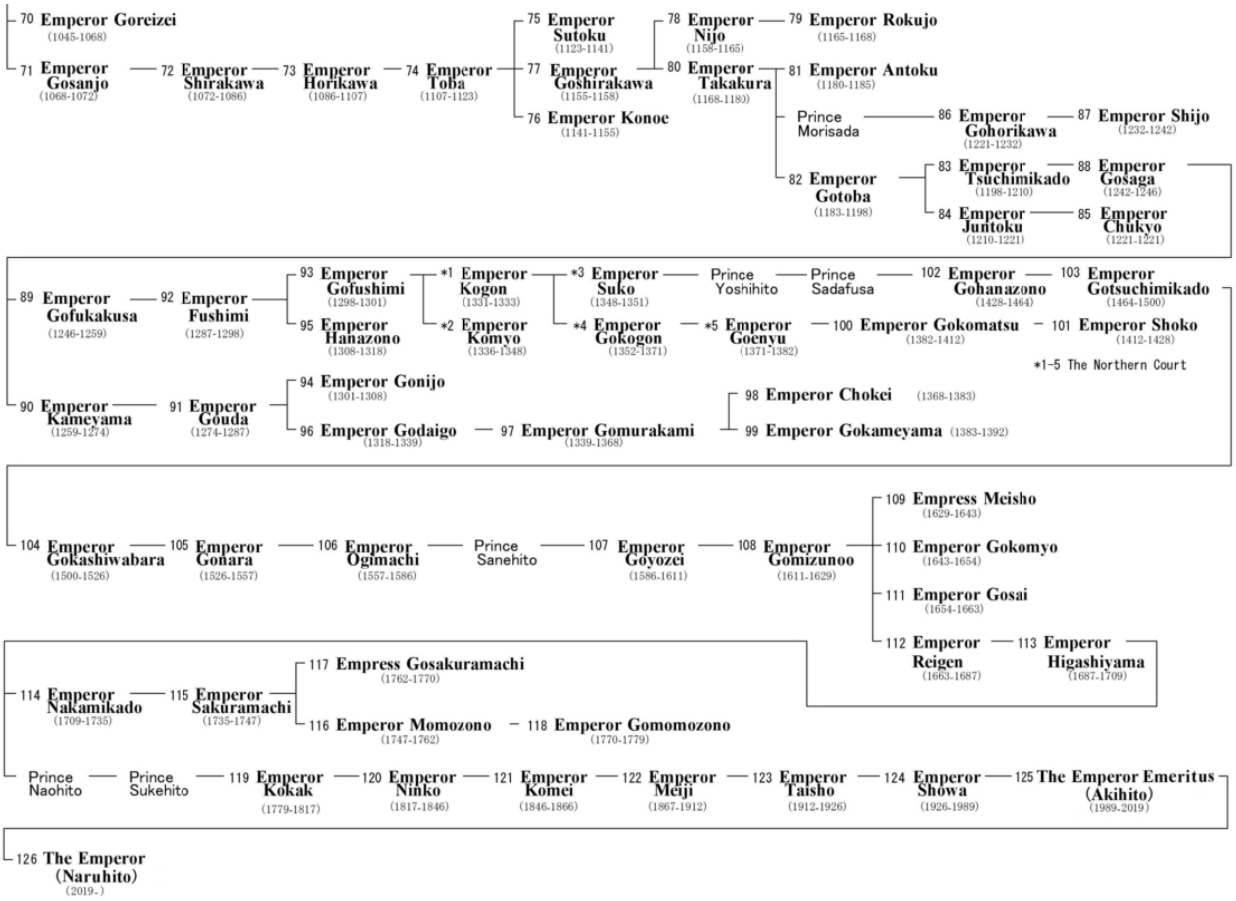
November 8, 2020: Rikkoshi-Senmei-no-gi: Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince

Ceremony to proclaim that Prince Fumihito has become the Crown Prince and for the representatives from home and abroad to express felicitations.

November 8, 2020: Choken-no-gi: First Audience

Ceremony for the Emperor and Empress to meet the Crown Prince for the first time after the Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince.




70 Emperor Goreizei (1045-1068)
71 Emperor Gosanjo (1068-1072)
72 Emperor Shirakawa (1072-1086)
73 Emperor Horikawa (1086-1107)
74 Emperor Toba (1107-1123)
75 Emperor Sutoku (1123-1141)
76 Emperor Konoe (1141-1155)
77 Emperor Goshirakawa (1155-1158)
78 Emperor Nijo (1158-1165)
79 Emperor Rokujo (1165-1168)
80 Emperor Takakura (1168-1180)
81 Emperor Antoku (1180-1185)
Prince Morisada
86 Emperor Gohorikawa (1221-1232)
87 Emperor Shijo (1232-1242)
82 Emperor Gotoba (1183-1198)
83 Emperor Tsuchimikado (1198-1210)
84 Emperor Juntoku (1210-1221)
85 Emperor Chukyo (1221-1221)
88 Emperor Gosaga (1242-1246)
89 Emperor Gofukakusa (1246-1259)
90 Emperor Kameyama (1259-1274)
91 Emperor Gouda (1274-1287)
92 Emperor Fushimi (1287-1298)
93 Emperor Gofushimi (1298-1301)
94 Emperor Gonijo (1301-1308)
95 Emperor Hanazono (1308-1318)
96 Emperor Godaigo (1318-1339)
97 Emperor Gomurakami (1339-1368)
*1 Emperor Kogon (1331-1333)
*2 Emperor Komyo (1336-1348)
*3 Emperor Suko (1348-1351)
*4 Emperor Gokogon (1352-1371)
*5 Emperor Goenyu (1371-1382)
Prince Yoshihito
Prince Sadafusa
98 Emperor Chokei (1368-1383)
99 Emperor Gokameyama (1383-1392)
100 Emperor Gokomatsu (1382-1412)
101 Emperor Shoko (1412-1428)
*1-5 The Northern Court
102 Emperor Gohanazono (1428-1464)
103 Emperor Gotsuchimikado (1464-1500)
104 Emperor Gokashiwabara (1500-1526)
105 Emperor Gonara (1526-1557)
106 Emperor Ogimachi (1557-1586)
Prince Sanehito
107 Emperor Goyozei (1586-1611)
108 Emperor Gomizunoo (1611-1629)
109 Empress Meisho (1629-1643)
110 Emperor Gokomyo (1643-1654)
111 Emperor Gosai (1654-1663)
112 Emperor Reigen (1663-1687)
113 Emperor Higashiyama (1687-1709)
114 Emperor Nakamikado (1709-1735)
115 Emperor Sakuramachi (1735-1747)
116 Emperor Momozono (1747-1762)
117 Empress Gosakuramachi (1762-1770)
118 Emperor Gomomozono (1770-1779)
Prince Naohito
Prince Sukehito
119 Emperor Kokak (1779-1817)
120 Emperor Ninko (1817-1846)
121 Emperor Komei (1846-1866)
122 Emperor Meiji (1867-1912)
123 Emperor Taisho (1912-1926)
124 Emperor Showa (1926-1989)
125 The Emperor Emeritus (Akihito) (1989-2019)
126 The Emperor (Naruhito) (2019-)

4. Activities of Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress

■ Official Duties, including Matters of State

The Emperor, with the advice and approval of the Cabinet, performs those acts in matters of state, provided for in the Constitution, acting on behalf of the people. These acts include Appointing Prime Minister as designated by the Diet, Appointing Chief Justice of the Supreme Court as designated by the Cabinet, Attesting the appointment and dismissal of Ministers of State and other officials, Convoking the National Diet, Promulgating laws and treaties, Awarding honors, Attesting the credentials of ambassadors, and Receiving foreign ambassadors and ministers. Documents of Cabinet decisions pertaining to such matters of state are sent to His Majesty following each Cabinet meeting, and His Majesty looks thoroughly through these documents before signing them and affixing his seal. During the course of 2019 (from May 1 onwards, hereinafter the same applies), His Majesty performed 700 such acts in matters of state. Furthermore, in relation to these matters of state, His Majesty attends the opening ceremony of the National Diet, and also takes part in ceremonies and events at the Imperial Palace. These ceremonies include Appointment of Prime Minister and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Appointment of Ministers and Officials with Imperial attestation, Receiving of Credentials of Foreign Ambassadors, and Awarding of honors.

At the Imperial Palace and the Akasaka Imperial Residence, Their Majesties host the above events and various others, such as audiences, teas, lunches and dinners, of which approximately 150 were held during 2019. Many of these events are organized to enable Their Majesties to have opportunities to offer their encouragement to people for their steady efforts in respective field, and express their appreciation to people who have accomplished outstanding achievements. These events provide opportunities for Their Majesties to meet with people from all sectors of society: People engaged in maintenance of law and order, such as National Diet members, Cabinet ministers, government officials, court judges and others; People engaged in medical and social welfare sectors such as doctors, nurses and others; Recipients of Honors and the Order of Cultural Merit; and honorees of the Japan Academy Prize and the Japan Art Academy Prize. For the purposes of nurturing international goodwill, State Banquets are held for visiting State Guests. Their Majesties also hold audiences and luncheons for other foreign dignitaries. Their Majesties also meet with foreign ambassadors at the time of their departure from Japan and during 2019 met with the ambassadors of 13 countries.

His Majesty attesting the appointment ministers of state at the palace

Their Majesties meet with each of the ambassadors of Japan prior to their overseas posting. Their Majesties also exchange letters and telegrams with the Heads of State of other countries, and during 2019 there were 439 such correspondence.

His Majesty makes Imperial donations, such as condolence money for natural disasters like earthquakes or typhoons, gifts to social work organizations, and funeral contributions on the demise of people of merit who have served the nation and society.

Since July 2019 His Majesty has served as the Honorary President of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In May 2019 Her Majesty was appointed the Honorary President of the Japanese Red Cross Society.

■ Official Visits within Japan

Their Majesties make visits to various events in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area, including annual visits such as the Memorial to the Nation's War Dead, the Japan Academy Prize Ceremony, the Japan Art Academy Prize

Ceremony, and the Japan Prize Ceremony. As Honorary President of the Japanese Red Cross Society, Her Majesty attends the annual meeting of the Japanese Red Cross Society, and the biannual Florence Nightingale Medal Award Ceremony.

Every year Their Majesties make four visits to regional areas of Japan to attend National Arbor Day, National Sports Festival, Festival for Cherishing Sea, and the National Cultural Festival and National Arts and Culture Festival for the Disabled. On the occasion of these visits Their Majesties also observe the situation in the regions of Japan, and from time to time make visits to attend international academic meetings.

Every year around the time of Children's Day, Respect for the Aged Day and the Week for Persons with Disabilities, Their Majesties make visits to related facilities to commemorate these special days and week.

From the time when they were Crown Prince and Crown Princess, Their Majesties have visited areas around the country that have been affected by natural disasters such as typhoons and torrential rains, and have visited areas affected by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and the Great East Japan Earthquake. After His Majesty's accession to the throne, in December 2019,Their Majesties visited regions (Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures) that had been affected by Typhoon No. 19 (Typhoon Hagibis), offering their sympathies to persons affected and encouragement to people engaged in relief efforts. Their Majesties continue to care for the wellbeing of people affected in every disaster region, including those that they visited, and maintain a deep interest in the status of reconstruction efforts.

Their Majesties actively communicate with the public under the circumstance of COVID-19 catastrophe

■ Fostering friendly relations with foreign countries

The Imperial Family facilitates the fostering of good relations on an international level through visits to other countries by the Emperor or other members of the Imperial Family, or by receiving a foreign country's monarch, Royal Family or President as distinguished guests. They also receive other foreign dignitaries or leading figures from abroad, exchange correspondence and telegrams with foreign Heads of State, or dispatch a representative to foreign countries on the occasion of celebration or sorrow (on appropriate occasions), and receive diplomatic missions residing in Japan.

♦ Receiving State Guests

State Guests (Kokuhin) are foreign Heads of State or equivalent who are officially invited and received by the Japanese Government with the utmost courtesy. The foreign Heads of State who will be invited and received by the Imperial Family are determined by a Cabinet Meeting. The reception of State Visits by the Imperial Family includes a welcoming ceremony attended by Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress, audiences with Their Majesties, State Banquet at the Imperial Palace and farewell calls by Their Majesties. Their Majesties, together with the rest of the Imperial Family, wholeheartedly receive these State Guests.

♦ Receiving Official Guests

Guests on Official Visits (Kouhin) are those whom the government invites and receives with the utmost courtesy, and are formally received by the Japanese Government. Such guests are typically members of a Royal Family from other countries, Heads of Administrative Organs or equally High-Ranking Officials. The decision to invite and receive them is made with the approval of a Cabinet Meeting. The details of the reception by the Imperial Family are determined in accordance with the individual guests.

Guests on Official Visits (Koushiki-jitsumu-houmon-hinkyaku) are typically foreign Heads of State, members of a Royal Family, Head of Administrative Organs or equivalent, who are visiting Japan mainly for practical and/or business matters. When such people make known their wishes to visit Japan, the Japanese Government considers the purpose of the visit and, with the approval of a Cabinet Meeting, may decide to officially invite and receive them as distinguished guests. These guests are also received by the Imperial Family, and the details of the reception are determined in accordance with the individual guests.

♦ Ceremony of the Presentation of Credentials

A newly appointed foreign ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary presents his/her credentials to His Majesty the Emperor. The Minister for Foreign Affairs or another Minister of State must be present.

A horse-drawn carriage or automobile owned by the Imperial Household may be provided to the Ambassador and his/her party for transportation to and from the Imperial Palace according to the Ambassador's wishes.

Column: About the horse-drawn carriages

During the Ceremony of the Presentation of Credentials, ceremonial horse-drawn carriages welcome newly appointed ambassadors to Japan and convey them from the Tokyo Station to the Imperial Palace South Porch.

Only a few countries worldwide, among them the United Kingdom and Spain, use horse-drawn carriages to welcome newly appointed ambassadors. In Japan, many ambassadors express a preference for the carriages over a conventional motorcade, attesting to the success of the ceremony in promoting international goodwill.

The ceremonial carriages used to welcome ambassadors are drawn by two horses and known as zagyoshiki. Most were manufactured from the end of the Meiji period(1868-1912) to the beginning of the Showa period(1926-1989) and have artistic value.

Processions of horse-drawn carriages are also used in Imperial Household ceremonies such as the accession of the Emperor to the throne and weddings of members of the Imperial Family.

♦ Audiences

An audience is a meeting of Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress with foreign Heads of State, Prime Ministers, Ambassadors and their spouses, and other distinguished guests. On such occasions Their Majesties have friendly conversations with these guests.

Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess and the rest of the Imperial Family also hold friendly meetings with foreign guests.

♦ Correspondence

Official letters that His Majesty the Emperor sends to foreign Heads of State, or those He writes in reply to the letters from foreign Heads of State, are referred to as Imperial Letters. Letters or replies to letters written by Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress or either of Their Majesties to persons other than foreign Heads of State may also be referred to as Imperial Letters.

Imperial Telegrams are those sent by His Majesty the Emperor or Their Majesties on such important occasions as a foreign State's National Day or Independence Day, the birthday of a King or Queen, on the occasion of the demise of a Head of State, or a major disaster. Replies to telegrams received on the occasion of either of Their Majesties' birthdays are also referred to as Imperial Telegrams.

By corresponding through these letters and telegrams, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress contribute to fostering friendly relations with foreign countries.

♦ Receiving Diplomatic Missions Residing in Japan

Newly appointed foreign Ambassadors Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary present His Majesty the Emperor with their credentials upon their arrival in Matsu-no-Ma (State Room) of the Imperial Palace. For this important ceremony, the Ambassador is offered, according to his/her preference, the service of either a ceremonial horse-drawn carriage or automobile for transportation. Transportation is provided along the route between the Tokyo Station and the Imperial Palace.

Diplomats posted in Japan may be invited to duck-netting and cormorant-fishing, which are Japanese traditions and heritage that have been preserved by the Imperial Family. Invitations may also be extended to visit the Imperial Stock Farm in Tochigi Prefecture.

The Imperial Family attends the duck-netting at the Saitama Imperial Wild Duck Preserve and Shinhama Imperial Wild Duck Preserve to entertain those invited.

♦ Overseas Visits

Upon the invitation of foreign governments, Their Majesties make overseas visits to foster international goodwill. They have also made overseas visits to attend funeral ceremonies for members of foreign royal families.

During overseas visits, Their Majesties meet the Heads of State of the countries as well as people from variety of sectors, make visits to many facilities in various regions relating to the history, culture, industry or social welfare of the country.

【Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress (in those times, Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess)】

2018		
September 7 - September 15	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	France
2017		
June 15 - June 21	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Denmark
April 13 - April 17	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Malaysia
2015		
July 2 - July 6	Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess	Tonga
January 25 - January 26	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Saudi Arabia
2014		
June 17 - June 23	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Switzerland
2013		
December 9 - December 11	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	South Africa
June 10 - June 16	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Spain
April 28 - May 3	Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess	the Netherlands
2012		
October 18 - October 21	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Luxembourg
June 25 - July 1	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Thailand, Cambodia, Laos
June 20 - June 21	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Saudi Arabia
2011		
October 26 - October 27	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Saudi Arabia
June 21 - June 25	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Germany
2010		
June 17 - June 21	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Sweden
March 6 - March 15	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Ghana, Kenya
2009		
February 9 - February 15	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Viet Nam
2008		
July 30 - August 3	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Tonga
July 16 - July 23	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Spain
June 16 - June 27	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Brazil
2007		
July 10 - July 17	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Mongolia
2006		
September 18 -September 20	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Tonga
March 15 - March 21	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Mexico
2005		
August 3 - August 4	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Saudi Arabia

2004		
September 8 - September 11	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Brunei Darussalam
May 12 - May 24	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Denmark, Portugal, Spain
2002		
December 11 - December 19	Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess	New Zealand, Australia
January 30 - February 4	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	the Netherlands
2001		
May 18 - May 25	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	United Kingdom
1999		
December 3 - December 7	Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess	Belgium
February 8 - February 9	Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess	Jordan
1995		
January 20 – January 28	Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess	Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Jordan
1994		
November 5 - November 15	Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess	Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain
1992		
July 18 - August 4	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Spain, Venezuela, Mexico
1991		
September 11 - September 24	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Morocco, United Kingdom
January 28 - February 1	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Norway
1989		
September 23 - October 1	His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince	Belgium

【Their Majesties the Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita(in those times, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress)】

2017		
February 28 - March 6	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Viet Nam
2016		
January 26 - January 30	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	the Philippines

2015		
April 8 - April 9	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Palau
2014		
December 11 - December 13	Her Majesty the Empress	Belgium
2013		
November 30 - December 6	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	India
2012		
May 16 - May 20	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	United Kingdom
2009		
July 3 - July 17	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Canada, United States (Hawaii)
2007		
May 21 - May 30	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, United Kingdom
2006		
June 8 - June 15	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Singapore, Thailand
2005		
June 27 - June 28	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	United States (Saipan)
May 7 - May 14	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Norway
2002		
July 6 - July 20	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Poland, Hungary
2000		
May 20 - June 1	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	the Netherlands, Sweden
1998		
May 23 - June 5	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	United Kingdom, Denmark
1997		
May 30 - June 13	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Brazil, Argentina
1994		
October 2 - October 14	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	France, Spain
June 10 - June 26	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	United States

1993		
September 3 - September 19	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Italy, Belgium, Germany
August 6 - August 9	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Belgium
1992		
October 23 - October 28	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	People's Republic of China
1991		
September 26 - October 6	Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress	Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia

【Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino and their Family】

2019		
September 15 - September 25	Her Imperial Highness Princess Kako	Austria, Hungary
August 16 - August 25	Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino and His Imperial Highness Prince Hisahito	Bhutan
July 9 - July 22	Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako	Peru, Bolivia
June 27 - July 6	Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino	Poland, Finland
2018		
July 17 - July 31	Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako	Brazil
June 4 - June 9	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	United States (Hawaii)
2017		
October 26 - October 27	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Thailand
September 25 - October 4	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Chile
May 31 - June 8	Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako	Bhutan
2016		
September 6 - September 16	Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako	Paraguay
May 10 - May 17	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Italy
2015		
December 2 - December 12	Her Imperial Highness Princess Mako	El Salvador, Honduras
October 27 - November 10	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Brazil

2014		
September 30 - October 10	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Guatemala, Mexico
June 27 - July 8	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Zambia, Tanzania
January 25 - February 5	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Peru, Argentina
2013		
June 19 - June 30	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia
February 3 - February 5	His Imperial Highness Prince Akishino	Cambodia
2012		
June 11 - June 17	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Uganda
2011		
January 24 - February 1	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Costa Rica
2009		
August 21 – August 27	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	the Netherlands
May 10 – May 23	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania
2008		
January 18 – January 25	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Indonesia
2006		
October 30 – November 7	His Imperial Highness Prince Akishino	Paraguay
2005		
January 14 - January 16	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Luxembourg
2004		
March 29 - March 31	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	the Netherlands
2003		
September 27 – October 7	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Fiji Islands, Tonga, Samoa

2002		
October 14 - October 17	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	the Netherlands
June 19 – June 28	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Mongolia
2001		
June 21 – June 28	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Cambodia
May 17 – May 20	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	the Netherlands
1999		
September 26 – September 29	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Germany
June 27 – July 8	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Vietnam, Laos, Thailand
1998		
September 25 - October 8	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Argentina
February 16 – February 20	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	the Philippines
1997		
May 9 - May 22	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Mexico, Jamaica
February 26 - March 7	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Nepal, Bhutan
1996		
March 9 - March 11	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Thailand
1995		
October 9 - October 16	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Australia
1993		
April 6 - April 8	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Spain
1992		
November 5 - November 24	Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino	Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India, Thailand
1991		
April 24 - April 27	His Imperial Highness Prince Akishino	United States
1989		
November 22 - November 24	His Imperial Highness Prince Akishino	Lichtenstein, Switzerland

5. Imperial Palace

The former Edo castle, the seat of the Shogunate, was turned into the Imperial Palace in 1868. It was officially named "Kyujo (the palace castle)" from 1888 to 1948. Since then it has been called simply"Kokyo (the Imperial Palace)".

The Imperial Palace contains the Fukiage Omiya Palace, the former residence of Emperor Showa and Empress Kojun ; the Imperial Palace, where various functions are conducted; the Imperial Household Agency buildings; Momijiyama Imperial Cocoonery; Toukagakudo (Imperial Concert Hall); and the East Gardens of the Imperial Palace.

Completed in October 1968 and coming into use in April of the following year, the Imperial Palace, a structure comprising a large roof, pillars and beams, was built using the beauty of traditional Japanese architecture and materials procured mostly from within Japan.

The Palace is a steel-reinforced concrete building of two stories with an underground floor and an inclined roof with long protruding eaves. It comprises the Seiden (the Main Building), and six wings (Homei-Den, Rensui, Chowa-Den, Chigusa-no-Ma and Chidori-no-Ma and others) and has a total floor space of 24,175 square metres.

Map of the Imperial Palace

Overview of the Imperial Palace