

Samurai Costume

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Samurai armour (*tosei gosoku*)

Made after 1500

Japan

Suit of modern samurai armour, which became popular after 1500. This is a decorative version, unlikely to have seen active service. The suit is made of lacquered metal plates laced with gold-coloured silk braid.

Helmet (*kabuto*)

Helmet in the *hoshi-bachi* style with an *agemaki* knot at the back. The neck guard (*shikoro*) attached to the helmet's rim is decorated with blue *kebiki* and blue/white lacing (*mimi-ito*). The helmet does not belong to the suit, but items acquired as spoils of war were often reworked to form a composite suit.

Face mask (*menu-shita-ho*)

The lacquered face mask covers the lower half of the face. It is decorated with grooves and a faint painted moustache. Horse hair and bear fur were later used. The inside of the mask was often lacquered red to give an angry glow. It is not clear how much of this was visible when the mask was worn.

Throat guard (*yodare kake*)

The throat guard hangs from the face mask. The two plates are held together with gold flat *kebiki* lacing. The decorative red cross knots on the edge are called *hishinui*.

Neck and throat guard (*nodowa*)

The neck and throat guard sits underneath the throat guard and lies on top of the cuirass. The *nodowa* was originally used with just a face mask. It is not needed when the throat guard is worn, but its use was later misunderstood and they were worn together.

Cuirass (*do*)

This is made of lacquered metal plates, which are laced together with gold braid. It opens at the right and has a large decorative knot at the back (*agemaki*), sometimes called a dragonfly knot. Lacing is mainly horizontal (*kebiki*) with some red cross knots (*hishinui*) at the back.

Armoured skirt (*gesan*)

The pieces of the skirt (*gesan*) hang from a leather waistband so they could be removed when marching. The three pieces are suspended from long flat gold lacing called vibrating cords (*yurugi-no-ito*), allowing ease of movement. Each piece is made up of five plates. The rows are held together with the horizontal lacing (*kebiki*).

Armoured sleeves (*kote*)

The sleeves are backed with blue brocade, covered with chain mail and plates (*ikada*). They lace up on the underside. The solid wrist plates are made from three sections with butterfly hinges, the hand plates hinge using chainmail. Mail was made of lacquered metal circles, joined at right angles with oval links, sewn onto fabric.

Shoulder guards (*sode*)

Shoulder guards originally acted as shields for mounted archers, leaving their hands free. They were also used as status symbols, with large exaggerated guards worn by those of high rank.

Various cords attach the guard to the bow on the back of the cuirass (*agemaki*) and stop the *sode* falling forwards.

Thigh guards (*haidate*)

Thigh guards made of silk brocade and lacquered scales. They hang from the fabric waistband to the knees. The overlapping scales (*iyozane*) are stitched to the brocade backing.

European cuffs influenced the frilled edges (*keshi*) and became fashionable on high status armour. Knots (*agemaki*) are tied to a ring on each thigh guard.

Shin guards (*tsutsu suneate*)

Shin guards made of shaped lacquered metal plates. The knee sections are laced together. The shin has butterfly hinges, like the sleeves.

These plates are sewn onto the brocade backing. Shin guards were used when warriors wore shoes, instead of the high riding boots of earlier armour.