

Shirekai

Location · Imperial Capital; Kajima (The Varekate)

Population: Approximately 90,000 (the largest city in Kajima, though not by as wide a margin as its political importance would suggest)

Government: Imperial Court of the Varek (the Sun Emperor governs through the Great Houses; the Varek is the institution of governance itself, with the Sun Emperor as its living embodiment and the Great Houses as its administrative body)

Shirekai is not the largest city in Kajima -- several coastal cities have larger populations. It is the most important one, and every Kajiman understands the distinction. The Varek governs from here. The Sun Emperor resides here. The Great Houses maintain their primary compounds here. Every thread of Kajiman political life passes through Shirekai at some point, and the city's physical layout reflects this: it was designed not around commerce or defense but around ceremony, hierarchy, and the visible expression of order. Outsiders who reach Shirekai -- which requires either specific invitation or the kind of persistence that Kajiman border protocols are designed to discourage -- describe it as breathtaking and bewildering. The city is genuinely beautiful: wide ceremonial avenues, immaculate maintained gardens, architecture that has been refined over centuries to express the values of Vareth in stone and wood and space. It is also a city where every movement through public space carries social meaning that outsiders cannot read, where every interaction is weighted with protocol they don't know, and where the politeness is so consistent and so complete that it takes several days to realize that no one has told them anything they weren't supposed to know.