

= Himeji Castle =

Himeji Castle ( 姫路城 , Himeji @-@ j? ) is a hilltop Japanese castle complex located in Himeji , in Hyogo Prefecture , Japan . The castle is regarded as the finest surviving example of prototypical Japanese castle architecture , comprising a network of 83 buildings with advanced defensive systems from the feudal period . The castle is frequently known as Hakuro @-@ j? or Shirasagi @-@ j? ( " White Egret Castle " or " White Heron Castle " ) because of its brilliant white exterior and supposed resemblance to a bird taking flight .

Himeji Castle dates to 1333 , when Akamatsu Norimura built a fort on top of Himeyama hill . The fort was dismantled and rebuilt as Himeyama Castle in 1346 , and then remodeled into Himeji Castle two centuries later . Himeji Castle was then significantly remodeled in 1581 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi , who added a three @-@ story castle keep . In 1600 , Tokugawa Ieyasu awarded the castle to Ikeda Terumasa for his help in the Battle of Sekigahara , and Ikeda completely rebuilt the castle from 1601 to 1609 , expanding it into a large castle complex . Several buildings were later added to the castle complex by Honda Tadamasa from 1617 to 1618 . For over 400 years , Himeji Castle has remained intact , even throughout the extensive bombing of Himeji in World War II , and natural disasters such as the 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake .

Himeji Castle is the largest and most visited castle in Japan , and it was registered in 1993 as one of the first UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the country . The area within the middle moat of the castle complex is a designated Special Historic Site and five structures of the castle are also designated National Treasures . Along with Matsumoto Castle and Kumamoto Castle , Himeji Castle is considered one of Japan 's three premier castles . In order to preserve the castle buildings , it underwent restoration work for several years and reopened to the public on March 27 , 2015 . The works also removed decades of dirt and grime , restoring the formerly gray roof to its original brilliant white color .

= = History = =

Himeji Castle 's construction dates to 1333 , when a fort was constructed on Himeyama hill by Akamatsu Norimura , the ruler of the ancient Harima Province . In 1346 , his son Sadanori demolished this fort and built Himeyama Castle in its place . In 1545 , the Kuroda clan was stationed here by order of the Kōdō clan , and feudal ruler Kuroda Shigetaka remodeled the castle into Himeji Castle , completing the work in 1561 . In 1580 , Kuroda Yoshitaka presented the castle to Toyotomi Hideyoshi , and in 1581 Hideyoshi significantly remodeled the castle , building a three @-@ story keep with an area of about 55 m<sup>2</sup> ( 590 sq ft ) .

Following the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 , Tokugawa Ieyasu granted Himeji Castle to his son @-@ in @-@ law , Ikeda Terumasa , as a reward for his help in battle . Ikeda demolished the three @-@ story keep that had been created by Hideyoshi , and completely rebuilt and expanded the castle from 1601 to 1609 , adding three moats and transforming it into the castle complex that is seen today . The expenditure of labor involved in this expansion is believed to have totaled 25 million man @-@ days . Ikeda died in 1613 , passing the castle to his son , who also died three years later . In 1617 , Honda Tadamasa and his family inherited the castle , and Honda added several buildings to the castle complex , including a special tower for his daughter @-@ in @-@ law , Princess Sen ( ?? , Senhime ) .

In the Meiji Period ( 1868 to 1912 ) , many Japanese castles were destroyed . Himeji Castle was abandoned in 1871 and some of the castle corridors and gates were destroyed to make room for Japanese army barracks . The entirety of the castle complex was slated to be demolished by government policy , but it was spared by the efforts of Nakamura Shigetō , an army colonel . A stone monument honoring Nakamura was placed in the castle complex within the first gate , the Hishi Gate ( 姫路門 , Hishinomon ) . Although Himeji Castle was spared , Japanese castles had become obsolete and their preservation was costly .

When the han feudal system was abolished in 1871 , Himeji Castle was put up for auction . The castle was purchased by a Himeji resident for 23 Japanese yen ( about 200 @,@ 000 yen or US \$ 2

@, @ 258 today ) . The buyer wanted to demolish the castle complex and develop the land , but the cost of destroying the castle was estimated to be too great , and it was again spared .

Himeji was heavily bombed in 1945 , at the end of World War II , and although most of the surrounding area was burned to the ground , the castle survived intact . One firebomb was dropped on the top floor of the castle but failed to explode . In order to preserve the castle complex , substantial repair work was undertaken starting in 1956 , with a labor expenditure of 250 @, @ 000 man @-@ days and a cost of 550 million yen . In January 1995 , the city of Himeji was substantially damaged by the Great Hanshin earthquake , but Himeji Castle again survived virtually undamaged , demonstrating remarkable earthquake resistance . Even the bottle of sake placed on the altar at the top floor of the keep remained in place .

= = = Historical recognition = = =

Himeji Castle was registered on December 11 , 1993 as one of the first UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Japan . Five structures of the castle are also designated National Treasures : Main Keep ( ??? , daitenshu ) , northwest small keep ( ???? , inui kotenshu ) , west small keep ( ???? , nishi kotenshu ) , east small keep ( ???? , higashi kotenshu ) , and I , Ro , Ha , Ni @-@ corridors and kitchen ( ? , ? , ? , ????????1? , i , ro , ha , ni no watariyagura tsuketari daidokoro 1 to ) . The area within the middle moat of the castle complex is a designated Special Historic Site .

Along with Matsumoto Castle and Kumamoto Castle , Himeji Castle is considered one of Japan 's three premier castles . It is the most visited castle in Japan , receiving over 2 @, @ 860 @, @ 000 visitors in 2015 . Starting in April 2010 , Himeji Castle underwent restoration work to preserve the castle buildings , and reopened to the public on March 27 , 2015 .

= = Design details = =

Himeji Castle is the largest castle in Japan . It serves as an excellent example of prototypical Japanese castle architecture , containing many of the defensive and architectural features associated with Japanese castles . The curved walls of Himeji Castle are sometimes said to resemble giant fans ( ?? , sensu ) , but the principal materials used in the structures are stone and wood . Feudal family crests ( ?? , kamon ) are installed throughout the architecture of the building , signifying the various lords that inhabited the castle throughout its history .

The Himeji Castle complex is located in the center of Himeji , Hy?go on top of a hill called Himeyama , which is 45 @. @ 6 m ( 150 ft ) above sea level . The castle complex comprises a network of 83 buildings such as storehouses , gates , corridors , and turrets ( ? , yagura ) . Of these 83 buildings , 74 are designated as Important Cultural Assets : 11 corridors , 16 turrets , 15 gates , and 32 earthen walls . The highest walls in the castle complex have a height of 26 m ( 85 ft ) . Joining the castle complex is Koko @-@ en Garden ( ??? , K?koen ) , a Japanese garden created in 1992 to commemorate Himeji city 's 100th anniversary .

From east to west , the Himeji Castle complex has a length of 950 to 1 @, @ 600 m ( 3 @, @ 120 to 5 @, @ 250 ft ) , and from north to south , it has a length of 900 to 1 @, @ 700 m ( 3 @, @ 000 to 5 @, @ 600 ft ) . The castle complex has a circumference of 4 @, @ 200 m ( 2 @. @ 6 mi ) . It covers an area of 233 hectares ( 2 @, @ 330 @, @ 000 m<sup>2</sup> or 576 acres ) , making it roughly 50 times as large as the Tokyo Dome or 60 times as large as Koshien Stadium .

Main Keep ( ??? , daitenshu ) at the center of the complex is 46 @. @ 4 m ( 152 ft ) high , standing 92 m ( 302 ft ) above sea level . Together with Main Keep , three smaller subsidiary keeps ( ??? , kotenshu ) form a cluster of towers . Externally , the keep appears to have five floors , because the second and third floors from the top appear to be a single floor ; however , it actually has six floors and a basement . The basement of Main Keep has an area of 385 m<sup>2</sup> ( 4 @, @ 140 sq ft ) , and its interior contains special facilities that are not seen in other castles , including lavatories , a drain board , and a kitchen corridor .

Main Keep has two pillars , with one standing in the east and one standing in the west . The east pillar , which has a base diameter of 97 cm ( 38 in ) , was originally a single fir tree , but it has since

been mostly original . The base of the west pillar is 85 by 95 cm ( 33 by 37 in ) , and it is made of Japanese cypress . During the Shōwa Restoration ( 1956 ? 1964 ) a Japanese cypress tree with a length of 26 @. @ 4 m ( 87 ft ) was brought down from the Kiso Mountains and replaced the old pillar . The tree was broken in this process , so another tree was brought down from Mount Kasagata , and the two trees were joined on the third floor .

The first floor of Main Keep has an area of 554 m<sup>2</sup> ( 5 @, @ 960 sq ft ) and is often called the " thousand @-@ mat room " because it has over 330 Tatami mats . The walls of the first floor have weapon racks ( ????, bugukake ) for holding matchlocks and spears , and at one point , the castle contained as many as 280 guns and 90 spears . The second floor has an area of roughly 550 m<sup>2</sup> ( 5 @, @ 900 sq ft ) .

The third floor has an area of 440 m<sup>2</sup> ( 4 @, @ 700 sq ft ) and the fourth floor has an area of 240 m<sup>2</sup> ( 2 @, @ 600 sq ft ) . Both the third and fourth floors have platforms situated at the north and south windows called " stone @-@ throwing platforms " ( ??? , ishiuchidana ) , where defenders could observe or throw objects at attackers . They also have small enclosed rooms called " warrior hiding places " ( ????, mushakakushi ) , where defenders could hide themselves and kill attackers by surprise as they entered the keep . The final floor , the sixth floor , has an area of only 115 m<sup>2</sup> ( 1 @, @ 240 sq ft ) . The sixth floor windows now have iron bars in place , but in the feudal period the panoramic view from the windows was unobstructed .

= = = Defenses = = =

Himeji Castle contains advanced defensive systems from the feudal period . Loopholes ( ?? , sama ) in the shape of circles , triangles , squares , and rectangles are located throughout Himeji Castle , intended to allow defenders armed with tanegashima or archers to fire on attackers without exposing themselves . Roughly 1 @, @ 000 loopholes exist in the castle buildings remaining today . Angled chutes called " stone drop windows " ( ??? , ishi @-@ otoshi @-@ mado ) were also set at numerous points in the castle walls , enabling stones or boiling oil to be poured on the heads of attackers passing by underneath , and white plaster was used in the castle 's construction for its resistance to fire .

The castle complex included three moats , one of which ? the outer moat ? is now buried . Parts of the central moat and all of the inner moats survive . The moats have an average width of 20 m ( 66 ft ) , a maximum width of 34 @. @ 5 m ( 113 ft ) , and a depth of about 2 @. @ 7 m ( 8 @. @ 9 ft ) . The Three Country Moat ( ??? , sangoku @-@ bori ) is a 2 @, @ 500 m<sup>2</sup> ( 27 @, @ 000 sq ft ) pond which exists inside the castle ; one of the purposes of this moat was to store water for use in fire prevention .

The castle complex , particularly the Waist Quarter ( ??? , koshikuruwa ) , contains numerous warehouses that were used to store rice , salt , and water in case of a siege . A building known as the Salt Turret ( ?? , shioyagura ) was used specifically to store salt , and it is estimated that it contained as many as 3 @, @ 000 bags of salt when the castle complex was in use . The castle complex also contained 33 wells within the inner moat , 13 of which remain ; the deepest of these has a depth of 30 m ( 98 ft ) .

One of the castle 's most important defensive elements is the confusing maze of paths leading to the castle 's keep . The gates , baileys , and outer walls of the complex are organized so as to confuse an approaching force , causing it to travel in a spiral pattern around the complex on its way to the keep . The castle complex originally contained 84 gates , 15 of which were named according to the Japanese syllabary ( I , Ro , Ha , Ni , Ho , He , To , etc . ) . At present , 21 gates from the castle complex remain intact , 13 of which are named according to the Japanese syllabary .

In many cases , the castle walkways even turn back on themselves , greatly inhibiting navigation . For example , the straight distance from the Hishi Gate ( ??? , hishinomon ) to Main Keep ( ??? , daitenshu ) is only 130 m ( 430 ft ) , but the path itself is a much longer 325 m ( 1 @, @ 066 ft ) . The passages are also steep and narrow , further inhibiting entry . This system allowed the intruders to be watched and fired upon from the keep during their lengthy approach , but Himeji Castle was never attacked in this manner so the system remains untested . However , even today with the route

clearly marked , many visitors have trouble navigating the castle complex .

= = Cultural impact = =

Himeji Castle is frequently known as Hakuro @-@ j? or Shirasagi @-@ j? ( " White Egret Castle " or " White Heron Castle " ) because of its brilliant white exterior and supposed resemblance to a bird taking flight . The castle has been featured extensively in foreign and Japanese films , including the James Bond movie " You Only Live Twice " ( 1967 ) , and Akira Kurosawa 's Kagemusha ( 1980 ) and Ran ( 1985 ) . In the television miniseries Shogun ( 1980 ) it served as a stand @-@ in for feudal @-@ era Osaka castle , which has lost the surrounding fortifications . In the video game Civilization Revolution , Himeji Castle is available to build as a world landmark .

= = Lore and legend = =

Himeji Castle is associated with a number of local legends . The well @-@ known kaidan ( or Japanese ghost story ) of Banchō Sarayashiki ( ????? , " The Dish Mansion at Banchō " ) is set in Edo ( Tokyo ) , but a variant called Banchō Sarayashiki ( ????? , " The Dish mansion in Harima Province " ) is set in Himeji Castle . There is a disputed claim that the castle is the bona fide location of the entire legend , and the alleged Okiku 's Well remains in the castle to this day . According to the legend , Okiku was falsely accused of losing dishes that were valuable family treasures , and then killed and thrown into the well . Her ghost remained to haunt the well at night , counting dishes in a despondent tone .

The legend of the " Old Widow 's Stone " ( ??? , Uragaishi ) is another folklore story associated with the castle . According to the legend , Toyotomi Hideyoshi ran out of stones when building the original three @-@ story keep , and an old woman heard about his trouble . She gave him her hand millstone even though she needed it for her trade . It was said that people who heard the story were inspired and also offered stones to Hideyoshi , speeding up construction of the castle . To this day , the supposed stone can be seen covered with a wire net in the middle of one of the stone walls in the castle complex .

A folklore story is also associated with Sakurai Genbei , who was Ikeda Terumasa 's master carpenter in the construction of the keep . According to the legend , Sakurai was dissatisfied with his construction , feeling that the keep leaned a little to the southeast . Eventually , he became distraught and climbed to the top of the keep , where he jumped to his death with a chisel in his mouth .

= = Visitor statistics = =

On April 14 , 2009 , the total number of visits since the Showa @-@ era restoration surpassed 40 million .

= = Gallery = =

Panoramic overview

Views from afar

Views from below

Views at night

Views from above

Views from the interior

Views with cherry blossoms