

National Historic Sites

The Remains of Yonago Castle, Castle in the Sky Commanding a fine view of Lake Nakaumi

Yonago Castle was originally constructed on the hill known as Minatoyama, located in what is now the central area of Yonago City. The castle was unique and magnificent in that, unlike other castles in Japan, it had two towers, a major one on top of the hill which had five stories, and a minor four-story one alongside the other. As such, it was referred to as "the finest castle in Sanin Area"; however, most of the structure is now gone, and only the remaining stone walls can still remind us of the castle's former glory. In 2006, the remains of the Hon-maru, the donjon, and the Ni-no-maru, the secondary bailey, were designated as national historic sites.

History of Yonago Castle

During the Warring States Period, what was subsequently known as Yonago Castle had been constructed to serve as a small fort under the orders of Yamana Muneyuki from 1467 to 1487. It was not until around 1591 in the last years of the Warring States Period that the fort began to be renovated into a castle, with the surrounding stone walls in Minatoyama constructed under the command of Kikkawa Hiroie, lord of the western part of the Hoki area.

At that time, Hiroie's main residence was Gassan Toda Castle, where Yasugi City in Shimane Prefecture is now, which served as the administrative center from which he ruled his territories that spanned over Izumo, western Hoki, and Oki. However, it was getting hard for him to rule from this location, so he focused on Yonago as a strategic hub that led to every territory of his. Thus, for the construction of his castle he chose the site of the Yonago Castle, which had Mt. Daisen as a natural shield, Lake Nakaumi as a natural moat, and state-of-the-art stone walls.

The construction did not go smoothly due to ongoing conflict, and by 1600, when the decisive Battle of Sekigahara ended the Warring States Period, Hiroie had only managed to finish 70% of it before being relocated to another domain. In 1602, the successor of Hiroie, Nakamura Kazutada took over the construction of Yonago Castle and finally completed it. Unfortunately, in 1609 Kazutada died a sudden death, thus ending the feudal bloodline of the Nakamura family. Afterwards, in 1610, Kato Sadayasu was put in charge of Yonago Castle, but shortly after that, in 1617, he was ordered to administer other domains, and was replaced by Ikeda Yoshiyuki.

In 1632, Ikeda Mitsunaka commanded his chief retainer, Arao Naritoshi to administer Yonago Castle; thereafter, the Arao family took charge of Yonago Castle for about 240 years until 1869 when the Meiji government established the prefectural system and abolished the traditional administration through feudal domains.

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STRUCTURES of Yonago Castle

The center of Yonago Castle was defended as follows: the donjon was located on the top of Minatoyama in the center, as well as Naizen-maru (named after Yokota "Naizen" Muraaki; "maru" usually means a compartment surrounded by stone walls) in the north, and Uneme-maru (on a hill called Iinoyama) in the east; the secondary bailey, the third one, and Ofunade (or Fukaura)-kuruwa were placed on the foot of Minatoyama; all the compartments were surrounded by an inner moat, the water of which was drawn from Lake Nakaumi; moreover, on the outside of the inner moat was a town of samurai residences surrounded by an outer moat, on the outside of which was a town of traders and artisans.

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Must-see Sights of The Remains of Yonago Castle

① Naizen-maru (Demaru)

It was a long and narrow kuruwa built on Maruyama and extended to the castle town. The Nobori-ishigaki stone wall was built from the kuruwa towards the Honmaru donjon. It functioned as a defense line of the Lake Nakaumi side of Yonago Castle.

② Nobori-ishigaki stone wall

It was built along the ridge from the downside of the Naizen-maru, towards the uphill side of the Tenshu-tomi-yagura guard tower.

③ Kuruwa near the Mizuno-te-gomon gate

The ruins of the kuruwa were discovered in 2015 during excavations. It extends towards Lake Nakaumi, on the south-west side of the Honmaru donjon.

④ Ni-no-maru, the second bailey

It was a two-story kuruwa surrounded by high stone-walls along the northern foot of Minatoyama. The upper story of the kuruwa housed a residential area for the lord of the castle, armories, samurai rooms and other important rooms.

⑤ San-no-maru, the third bailey

It was a wide kuruwa surrounded by an inner moat extending from Iinoyama and Minatoyama towards the north side of Maruyama. It housed a soldier station, a civil construction magistrate station, stables, rice granaries, riding grounds and other facilities.

⑥ Nagaya-mon gate of the Ohara family

Formerly a gate of the house of the Ohara family, retainers of the Arao family, it was relocated from the castle town.

⑦ Masugata-koguchi, or square-shaped castle entrance

It was an entrance for the Ni-no-maru bailey and also functioned as a meeting point for castle soldiers.

⑧ Ofunade kuruwa (Fukaura kuruwa)

It faced the Nakaumi-Fukaura area, or the southern foot of Minatoyama. It housed boatmen residences, boathouses and other facilities. The Fukaura Suigun naval forces were deployed here to defend maritime security and monitor ships entering the castle town.

⑨ Uneme-maru on Iinoyama

The kuruwa was built on a hill called Iinoyama. It was a three level kuruwa surrounded by high stone-walls. The second level was like an obiguruwa (belt like kuruwa).

⑩ Bansho guard station ruins

A guard station of the Honmaru donjon used to be here. Tatebori trenches extended towards Masugata-koguchi, or square-shaped castle entrance.

⑪ Tomi-yagura guard tower ruins

There are spectacular views of Lake Nakaumi far below and the lofty Tenshudai (raised foundation of the Tenshu castle keep) behind you. The Nobori-ishigaki stone wall leads here.

⑫ Mizuno-te-gomon gate

It was a gateway of the kuruwa, which extended towards the Lake Nakaumi side, or the west side of the Tenshu castle keep. It leads to a road descending down towards Fukaura.

⑬ Kurogane-mon iron gate ruins

There was a gate reinforced with iron boards.

⑭ Raised foundation of four level Yagura guard tower

There are towering stone walls made with the Kirikomi-hagi stacking technique, which were repaired at the end of the Edo period. The Wasure-ishi stone is on the corner.

⑮ Honmaru donjon (Tenshudai)

The kuruwa surrounded by high stone-walls is on the top of Minatoyama. It housed the Tenshu kuruwa, Tomi kuruwa, Bansho kuruwa and others. Two castle keeps, the Tenshu and four level Yagura guard tower, were built in the Tenshu kuruwa.

Visitors can enjoy 360-degree panoramic views of Yonago City, Mt. Daisen, Lake Nakaumi and the Shimane Peninsula.

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