



Sightseeing Guide

A Classic Modern Castle

Modern castles were the military, political and economic centers of an area and were ruled by a Lord. Hikone Castle is a well-preserved example of such a castle as it was not only a military hub in that it had defensive structures, such as a main keep and moats, but also a political and cultural center with a day palace and residence for the local Lord, and an economic center on account of the castle town.

1 Tenshu (National Treasure)

The 3-storied main keep is built on a foundation of Gobo-zumi stonework ("burdock" masonry using long fitted bounders backfilled with smaller stones). The roof uses a combination of Kirizumahafu (gables with no bottom edge), Irimoyahafu (gables that are part of and indistinguishable from the roof) and Karahafu (curved gables with no bottom edge), while Katomado (bell-shaped windows) are used on the second and third floors and the third floor features verandas on all four corners with high railing, making this one of the most beautiful keeps to be found anywhere in Japan.



1 Gables: The triangular features on the outside of the castle. These include Kirizumahafu (gables with no bottom edge), Irimoyahafu (gables that are part of and indistinguishable from the roof), Karahafu (curved gables with no bottom edge) and Chidorihafu (gables where the sides are joined at an angle to the roof). The type of gable employed depends on the shape of the roof, which includes Kirizuma (two sides are joined at the top to cover the building) and Irimoya (the roof extends out and up from each side of the rectangular structure).

Diagrammatic information about castle features: Katomado (bell-shaped windows), Irimoyahafu, Karahafu, Chidorihafu, Verandas with high railing, Kirizumahafu, Katomado, Irimoyahafu, Internal View (longitudinal beams), Teppozama (gun embrasures), and Yazama (arrow embrasures).

2. In many cases, long, narrow fortified storehouses were used not merely for storing things such as weapons, but were built in important defensive locations and in effect formed the walls of the castle. Hisashide Matsunaga (1510-1577) was the first to use this style of construction when he built Tamon Castle in Nara. [3. Stones that were much longer and larger than they appear from the outside were used and despite the fact that there are what appear to be large gaps in between them, the wall is, in fact, very strong. [4. The most common style used today, with Tanizumi stones are fitted together at an angle to form a diagonal pattern. In many cases the Tanizumi style used in the Edo Period was rough and irregular, which resulted in it being referred to as Otoshizumi.

2 Ninomaru Sawaguchi Tamonyagura (Important Cultural Property)

The Tamonyagura (a long fortified storehouse built above moats) on the left facing towards Sawaguchi was lost in a fire that broke out in 1767 and was rebuilt between 1769 and 1771. The Tamonyagura on the right hand side was restored in 1960.



3 Tenbinyagura (Important Cultural Property)

Located at the place where the paths from Otomon (Main Gate) and Omotemon (Front Gate) converge, the Tenbinyagura has a 2-storied turret at each end and a gate in the middle. The reason for its name is that it is shaped like a balance scale. There are no other examples of this shape of fortified storehouse, which has a good balance of both beauty and strength. Although it has been repaired many times over the years, in 1854 it was repaired right down to the stonework foundation. The right hand side as seen from Rokabashi ("Corridor" Bridge) features the original Gobo-zumi style of stonework, while the left hand side uses the later Otoshizumi style.



4 Taikomonyagura (Important Cultural Property)

Taikomonyagura (Drum Gate Fortified Storehouse) is the final gateway leading up to the Main Bailey and was named after the fact that it housed the drum, which was used for communication in the castle. On the left hand side there is a wall that has been cut out of the natural rock while on the Eastern side there is no wall but a high handrail between the pillars that forms a hallway, which is something that is rarely seen.

5 Nishinomaru Sanjuyagura (Important Cultural Property)

One of the other 3-storied buildings apart from the main keep in Hikone Castle is the fortified storehouse located in the northwest corner of Nishinomaru (Western Bailey). Connected to the east and north by single-storied structures in an L-shape, although it does not have the decorative gables of the main keep, it still has the same simple yet classy design and white plaster finish on all the walls.



6 Stables (Important Cultural Property)

The stables usually contained 21 horses ready for use by the Lord of Hikone and there are no other examples of such large-scale stables in modern castles anywhere in Japan.

7 Genkyu Rakurakuen (Area of Scenic Beauty)

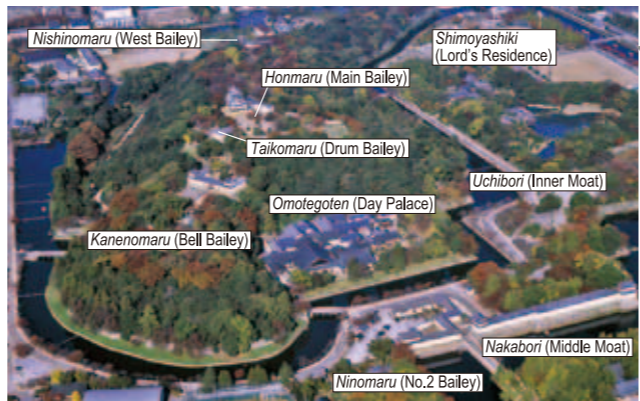
This palace was built in 1677 by Naooki Ii, the 4th Lord of Hikone, as his second residence. The building is known as Rakurakuen, while the garden is known as Genkyuen. A modern style garden designed to be walked through, Genkyuen was built around a large pond with features such as islands and inlets joined by bridges. Hikone Castle is the only example of such a residence and garden located within the grounds of a castle.



0749-22-2742 (Hikone Castle Office) | 8:30-17:00 | Open every day. | Adults: ¥200, Children: ¥100 Hikone Castle + Genkyuen Combined Pass also available. Adults: ¥600, Children: ¥200 | 10 minutes on foot from JR Hikone Station.

Territorial Features

Despite being built in the early part of the modern period, Hikone Castle still retains features such as the defensive earthworks around the main bailey that are typical of mountaintop castles from the Middle Ages. Furthermore, as it was built with the aim of monitoring the power of the Toyotomi faction following the Battle of Sekigahara, in order to build it more quickly, it is said that buildings and stonework were taken from nearby Sawayama Castle, as well as from other older castles in the vicinity, such as Otani Castle, Nagahama Castle and Otsu Castle. In addition to hiding the overall structure of the castle, the deep green forest that was planted to cover the site provided a source of food and medicine for when the castle was under attack.



A Recycled Castle

In the records of the Ii family, the rulers of the Hikone Domain, it is recorded that the main keep was taken from Otsu Castle and rebuilt on this site. Other examples of structures taken from other castles include the Tenbinyagura (Balance Scale-Shaped Fortified Storehouse), Nishinomaru Sanjuyagura (Western Bailey 3-Storeyed Fortified Storehouse) and Taikomonyagura (Drum Gate Fortified Storehouse), which were taken from nearby Nagahama Castle. The reason that so much was taken from other castles was because it was necessary to complete the castle quickly in order to monitor the Toyotomi faction after the Battle of Sekigahara. This was possible due to the fact that the castles were largely made of wood, which made recycling relatively easy.



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8 Omotegoten (Hikone Castle Museum)

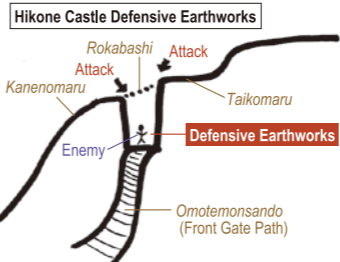
The Day Palace was where the day-to-day administrative activities of the Hikone Domain were carried out and also served as the residence of the Lord. Although it was dismantled in 1878, after an archaeological survey it was resurrected in 1987 to serve as the Castle Museum. Only the exterior of the front area used for administrative purposes was restored, with the interior being used to display artifacts and historical documents handed down through the generations within the Ii family. The rear area, which was used by the Lord as his private quarters, was faithfully restored using wood.



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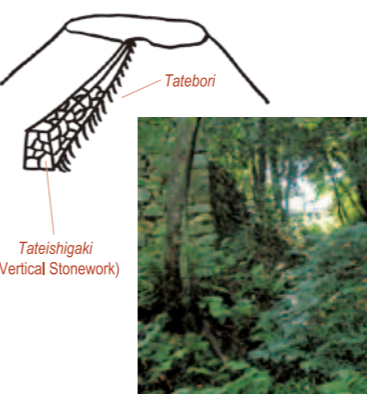
9 Horikiri (Defensive Earthworks)

Between Kanenomaru (Bell Bailey) and Taikomaru (Drum Bailey) is a dry moat where the ridge is cut vertically to impede the progress of an enemy attacking from Otomon (Main Gate) or Omotemon (Front Gate). Rokabashi ("Corridor" Bridge) was built over this defensive earthwork and could quickly be torn down so that an enemy could be attacked on both sides from Tenbinyagura (Balance Scale Fortified Storehouse) and Kanenomaru (Bell Bailey). The same kind of defensive earthworks can be seen between Nishinomaru (West Bailey) and Dekuruwa (outer base).



10 Tateishigaki (Vertical Stonework) and Tatebori (Vertical Dry Moat)

Vertical stonework runs from the top to the bottom of a hill to prevent an enemy from moving across a slope and can be found in a total of five locations within Hikone Castle. In this castle, the top of the vertical stonework is surrounded by a wall with tiles on top. This defensive structure was employed by Hideyoshi Toyotomi in the castles he built when attacking the Korean Peninsula during the Bunroku and Keicho Wars and can be found in Japan not only in Hikone Castle, but also in Sumoto Castle (Hyogo Prefecture) and Matsuyama Castle (Ehime Prefecture).



Inner Moat Stonework

There is a stone wall built around the lower part of an earthen embankment known as Koshimaki Ishigaki (Waistband Stonework) at the top of the stonework facing the Inner Moat, while the stonework used on the top of this earthen embankment is known as Hachimaki Ishigaki (Headband Stonework). Although this kind of stonework is rarely seen in the Kansai region, it can be found in modern castles built in the Kanto region and further north.



彦根

への旅

A Journey to Hikone





**World Heritage Site**

Construction Date: Edo Period | 1604 ~ 1622  
 Constructed By: Naotsugu II | Naotaka II  
 Location: Hikone City, Shiga Prefecture  
 Type: Hilltop Castle



Hikone Castle 彦根城

Tenbinyagura (Important Cultural Property)



Tenbinyagura (Important Cultural Property)



Taikomonyagura (Important Cultural Property)

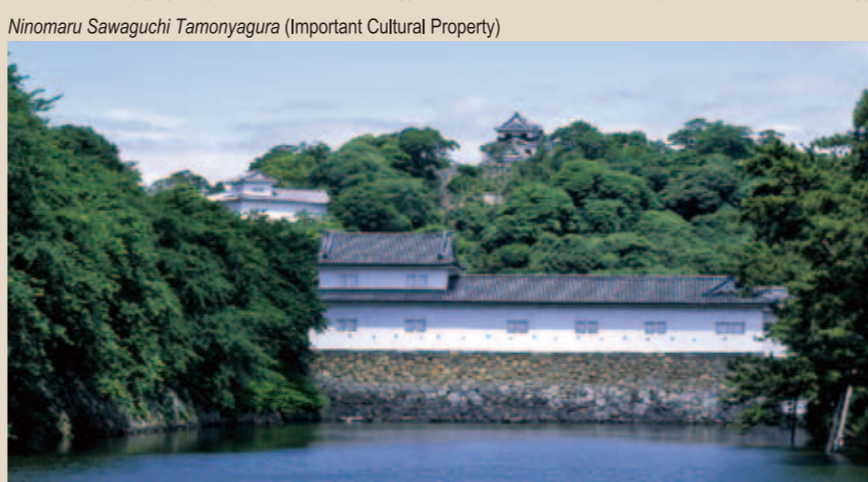
Hikone Castle Today



Nishinomaru Sanjuyagura (Important Cultural Property)



Stables (Important Cultural Property)



Ninomaru Sawaguchi Tamonyagura (Important Cultural Property)

Restoration and Preservation

In the years after it was completed, the castle experienced its share of damage from wind, water, earthquakes and fire and from records surviving from that time we are able see how maintenance and repair of the castle was undertaken with the permission of the Shogunate. When the era of governance by the warrior class came to an end with the Meiji Reformation, the dismantling of Hikone Castle began. However, when Shigenobu Okuma passed through the area on his way to Northern Japan with the Meiji Emperor, being saddened by the sight he successfully implored the Emperor to save the castle. The Emperor's cousin is also said to have asked for the same thing. Either way, Hikone Castle was lucky in that only a section of it was dismantled and the main buildings were saved and preserved in the condition that we see them today. Hikone Castle is one of the best surviving castles anywhere in Japan and in 1956 was designated a Special Historic Site.

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The 350,000 koku (1 koku=4.96 bushels) rice production of the Hikone Domain's Ii family speaks much of the castle's stately past.

Surrounded by trees and set against the sapphire blue of Lake Biwa over the four centuries since it was built. The three-storied main keep, which is classified as a National Treasure, is surrounded by other nationally important cultural properties, such as Tenbinyagura (a balance scale-shaped fortified storehouse) and other stately structures. Within the grounds of the castle can also be found scenic gardens and beautifully restored buildings that are renowned throughout Japan as precious cultural assets and areas of natural beauty that people are enchanted by no matter which season it is when they come to visit.

The Story Behind the Construction of Hikone Castle

The Battle of Sekigahara — Battle for the Sundered Realm

The history of Hikone Castle begins with the Battle of Sekigahara on September 15, 1600. This battle, which later came to be known as the "Battle for the Sundered Realm" and formed the foundation for the Edo Shogunate, saw the forces of Naomasa II, one of the Four Guardians of the Tokugawa, draw first blood and a number of Western generals defect, which brought the battle to an end after just one day.

On account of his performance in the battle, Naomasa was given Sawayama Castle, which formerly belonged to Mitsunari Ishida, one of the enemy generals, and became the first Lord of the Hikone Domain. He determined to build a new castle in Hikone but died, however, in 1602 of a gunshot wound sustained at the Battle of Sekigahara before he could make a start. His son and successor, Naotsugu, approached Ieyasu Tokugawa through his Chief Retainer, Morikatsu Kimata, about moving the castle to Mt. Hikone. Receiving his approval, construction commenced in 1604, with much of the mountaintop Sawayama Castle's stonework and buildings, which had been constructed in the Middle Ages, reportedly being transported to Mt. Hikone.

The Role of Hikone Castle

Hikone lies on the shores of Lake Biwa at the crossroads of the Tosando (Road to Eastern Japan) (later called Nakasendo (Road to Central Japan)) and the Hokkoku Kaido (Road to Northern Japan).

Sawayama Castle was built at the beginning of the Kamakura Period on account of the ongoing battles that took place over the control of this strategic area. It was so important to both Nobunaga Oda and Hideyoshi Toyotomi that they sent senior statesmen such as Nagahide Niwa and Mitsunari Ishida to be Lords of Sawayama Castle. After the battle of Sekigahara, Ieyasu Tokugawa installed the Ii family in order to control the powerful Toyotomi family and other Western Lords loyal to them and the construction of Hikone Castle was made a matter of priority.

Construction was Carried Out in Two Stages

The construction of Hikone Castle took approximately 20 years and can be divided into two distinct periods. The former was when officials were dispatched from the Shogunate and the various Lords of the Kinki area were ordered to contribute. This was known as "Tenkafushin". Although major areas of the castle complex, such as Tenshu (Main Keep) and Kanenomaru (Bell Bailey) were completed around 1607, construction was suspended for two years from 1614 during the Battle of Osaka. After that war ended, construction was recommenced by the Hikone Domain alone and the castle, including the surrounding town, was completed by about 1622.

Constructed under the leadership of the Shogunate.



彦根城

Hikone Castle



Castle Town Guide

The castle town around Hikone Castle includes areas surrounded by the outer moat and middle moat and is divided up into areas with residences for samurai and ordinary people with specific occupations. Even today, the narrow, winding streets with their distinctive gates and buildings remind us of the town's rich cultural heritage.

Hanashobudori (Iris Street)



A new shopping arcade with an historic atmosphere runs eastward from Kyuza no tuji. In this area you can find many interesting shops, such as "Chikaraishi", which is located in the old historical school, and "Sengokumaru", which features a range of goods from the Sengoku Period.

0749-22-1026 (Iris Street Shopping Arcade Promotion Association (Itohan Shinise)) | 15 minutes on foot from JR Hikone Station.

Ashigarukumiyashiki

The residential area for the infantry, which was located outside the outer moat and was one of Hikone Castle's defensive structures, remains largely intact even to this day. These buildings usually have gardens surrounded by walls with gates and while on a much smaller scale, still boast the overall style of houses built for the samurai.



Sawayama Castle Ruins



Some say that the castle was built at the base of Mt. Sawa by Omi Lord Sasaki at the beginning of the Kamakura Period and that Mitsunari Ishida then took over in 1595. After the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, most of the castle was removed and used in the construction of Hikone Castle. However, the earthen embankment, inner moat, approach path and Sengan (Precious) Well remain to reveal to us today something about what the area must have looked like 400 years ago.

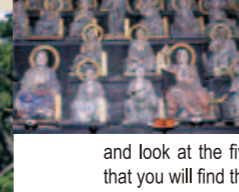
0749-30-6120 (Hikone City Tourism Promotion Section) | 20 minutes on foot from JR Hikone Station (About 45 minutes to the top.)

Ryotani

At the base of Sawayama lie the remains of a Buddhist temple. Famous as a place of learning, many gardens built by students as part of their studies remain to this day. Fudaraku Garden is especially renowned for its beauty.

0749-22-2777 | 9:00-17:00 (9:00-16:00 in winter.) | ¥400 | 10 minutes by car from JR Hikone Station.

Tenneiji



The 11th Lord of Hikone, Naonaka, ordered the execution of a maid who was pregnant with an illegitimate child. On learning that his son had been the father, he ordered the temple built in memorial of the woman and her child. It is said that if you go and look at the five hundred Buddhist statues (rakan) that you will find the face of someone you want to meet.

0749-22-5313 | 8:00-17:00 | ¥200 | 30 minutes on foot from JR Hikone Station.

Ohorabenzaiten (Choujuin)

The 4th Lord of Hikone Castle, Naooki, built this temple to Benzaiten on this site, which he believed was an area of bad luck.

0749-22-2617 | 9:00-17:00 | Free | 15 minutes by car from JR Hikone Station.

Inquiries / Publisher

Yume Kyobashi Castle Road

This new road recreates the hustle and bustle of the Edo Period. All of the buildings have distinctive white walls with black latticework and gable roofs and restaurants and general stores stand side by side with souvenir shops.



Yume Kyobashi Akarikan

Yume Kyobashi Akarikan showcases one of Hikone's traditional industries. Here you can buy candles or enjoying making your own.

0749-27-5501 | Charge for 2F Gallery and Candlemaking | 9:30-17:30 | Closed Tuesdays (Open if Public Holiday and then closed on the following day. | 15 minutes on foot from JR Hikone Station.

Yonbancho Square

This area is rich in the romance of the Taisho Period and features Yonbancho Dining, which showcases local food and souvenirs, as well as Japanese, Chinese and Western-style restaurants.



Lake Biwa Sightseeing Cruises (Port Hikone)

Two cruises are available. One to Takeshima and one to Chikubushima, which is known as one of the eight sites of Lake Biwa.

0749-22-0619 (Omi Marine Port Hikone Office) | Takeshima: 70 minutes, ¥1,720 | Chikubushima: 150 minutes, ¥3,300 | 10 minutes by shuttle bus from JR Hikone Station to Port Hikone.

Hikone Castle Moat Boat Rides

Enjoy a pleasant ride on the inner moat of Hikone Castle in a replica of the Okonomiyakata Bune that was owned by Hikone Lord II. Please ask for details regarding the spring/autumn night rides and the winter (Dec.-Feb.) schedule.

080-1461-4123 (NPO Koedo Hikone) | 10:00-15:00 (16:00 on weekends and holidays) | Adults: ¥1200, Children under 12: ¥600, Children under 3: Free | Half price for physically challenged and caregivers | 10 minutes on foot from JR Hikone Station.



Painting of Hikone Castle and its Environs (Displayed in Hikone Castle Museum)

Although Lake Matsubara and the outer moat have been filled in, the overall look of the town has not changed that much over the years.

