

Princess Sen

One of Himeji Castle's most famous residents was Princess Sen (1597–1666), a noblewoman whose life was marked by political drama and personal tragedy.

Princess Sen was a granddaughter of the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), and in 1616 she married the heir to the Honda clan, the lords of Himeji. It was her second marriage. Princess Sen was first married in 1603, at the age of six, to the ten-year-old Toyotomi Hideyori (1593–1615), the son of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598). Hideyoshi had unified Japan under his rule, and his death left a power vacuum. Princess Sen's marriage was a political match meant to unite the powerful Toyotomi and Tokugawa clans, but the peace it secured was short-lived. In 1615, Ieyasu went to war with Princess Sen's husband Hideyori, attacking his stronghold in Osaka and burning it to the ground. Princess Sen was rescued as the fortress fell, but Hideyori chose to commit suicide to preserve his honor.

A year later, at the age of nineteen, Princess Sen married Honda Tadatoki (1596–1626) and relocated to Himeji. Her residence in the castle's Third Bailey is believed to have been stunningly beautiful, and their marriage was a happy union by all accounts. The couple had two children: a girl, Katsu (1618–1678), and a boy, Kōchiyo (1619–1621). But Kōchiyo died of an illness at the age of two, and his father died just a few years later.

After the loss of her only son and second husband, Princess Sen returned to the capital city of Edo (now Tokyo), and became a Buddhist nun. She mourned her lost husbands and son until her death at the age of sixty-nine.