

Women's Quarters in the West Bailey Gallery

A World Apart

Female servants and ladies-in-waiting looked after the lord of the castle and his family. Their quarters were in the gallery of the West Bailey, which was attached to the inner residential buildings of the castle. Similar arrangements were also used in the shogun's castle and the emperor's palace. Himeji's gallery consisted of a row of shared rooms opening off a long corridor, each of which contains enough space to lay out eight tatami mats (about 13 square meters). This was home for most of the castle's female occupants. Princess Sen (1597–1666) had twenty-three ladies-in-waiting and sixteen lower-ranking servants. Three additional ladies-in-waiting looked after her daughter, Katsu (1618–1678).

The Apartment Gallery in Later Years

The gallery's role changed over time, depending on the needs and resources of the castle's lords. In an illustration drawn some 80 years after Princess Sen left Himeji, several areas along the corridor are marked with the words “dried boiled rice,” suggesting that the rooms were used as storage for emergency food supplies rather than as living quarters.

Gosho Bōkō Azuma Nikki, an illustrated diary of life in the women's quarters of the shogun's castle