

Churches Where East and West Meet

The first churches were simple ones, constructed by Japanese builders working under the direction of the European missionaries. Eventually, though, the Japanese builders acquired sufficient know-how so that, with the assistance of the villagers, they were able to build wonderful (albeit unpretentious) churches by fusing Western and Japanese techniques and materials. The church exteriors were based on European forms and designs, while the interiors called upon Japanese vernacular architecture to fit with Japanese customs. For instance, the layout was designed for the congregation to remove their shoes at the entrance and pray sitting either on the floor or on tatami mats.

While most of the Hidden Christians chose to return to Catholicism, others chose to stick with the unique rituals they had developed over the centuries of underground worship. People of this latter group, which still exists in the Nagasaki region today, are known as Kakure Kirishitan.

Chronology

1854 Japan and the United States sign Convention of Kanagawa. Japan promises to open its ports to trade.

1858 United States and Japan sign Treaty of Amity and Commerce.

1865 Consecration of Ōura Cathedral.

1865 Discovery of the Hidden Christians.

1867 Fourth Urakami Crackdown.

1873 The Meiji government removes signboards proscribing Christianity.