

The Outer Ward and the Rekhora-uni

The use of the large Outer Ward (*gaikaku*) is not well understood, and archaeological excavations are currently underway. Remains of one residence and other structures have been found. Its stone wall is lower in height than others at Nakijin, reflecting lesser importance.

Nakijin Castle had social, economic, as well as spiritual significance, which is common for important places in Okinawa. Though the castle has long ceased to function as a political or military center, it is still used for religious ceremonies, which are led by hereditary priestesses called *noro*.

Rekhora-uni is a modest but important spiritual site. Two simple earthen mounds (*uni*) represent boats, one named for Nakijin, and one for Motobu. Every summer, a special ritual to honor the sea god has been performed following the Buddhist festival of the dead (*kyu-bon*). During the “boat-rowing” (*unifuji*) ceremony, three bamboo poles are laid on each mound, which are then symbolically rowed across the ocean as participants proceed to the Heiro-mon gate. Like many aspects of Ryukyuan culture and religion, the origin of this ceremony is unclear, but it celebrates the connections between the people and the ocean and their memory of crossing it in ages long past.