

The Castle Walls of the Ushimi Ward

This photograph of the massive, 7-meter-high Ushimi wall was taken in the late 1920s. This wall was the major defensive rampart of Nakijin Castle and encloses the castle's Ushimi Ward. Like the other walls of Nakijin, it is constructed of unworked, hard gray Ryukyu limestone. Larger stones are used for the outer layers of the wall, and the space between them is filled with smaller stones. This method, called *nozura-zumi*, is the only method suited to the hardness of the stone found nearby. It is also considered the earliest technique developed for building stone walls. The softer limestone used in other Ryukyuan castles allowed finer stone-working methods to be used. Walls made of stones shaped into rectangular forms and laid in regular layers are called *nunozumi*, because they resemble woven fabric (*nuno*). The most skillful method shapes the stones into closely fitted polygons, called *aikatazumi*. These wall-building methods can be seen at other Okinawan castles, such as Shuri, Nakagusuku, and Katsuren.

The construction of stone castles in Okinawa began about 100 years earlier than it did in the main islands of Japan. Like Japanese castles, Ryukyuan ones are divided into a sequence of secure enclosures, or wards, with the most secure one at the highest elevation. The elegant arcs of Nakijin's walls are typical of Ryukyu castles, and may reflect Chinese or Korean influence. Japanese castle walls, on the other hand, are more strictly geometric with sharp corners and a sloping profile. Ryukyu castles do not have the large multistory defensive towers that characterize Japanese castles.

Most of Nakijin Castle's walls seen today are from the original construction, but some sections have crumbled over the years from natural and other causes. Restoration and maintenance work are continually in progress.

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The Main Gate

This is the main gate of the castle, roofed with large, single stones and protected by a massive watchtower. The narrow rectangular openings on either side, ostensibly for archers, were added during the careful restoration completed in 1962.