

Upper Utaki

Utaki are sacred sites unique to Ryukyuan beliefs, where rituals and ceremonies are held to honor gods, ancestors, and natural forces. They are usually somewhat small and located in places that have a special natural feature, such as a grove of trees, a cave, spring, or unique arrangement of stones. The TENCHIJI-AMACHIJI, also called the Upper Utaki, is the most important *utaki* at Nakijin, where the guardian god of the castle is believed to reside. In the past, ladies of the court offered prayers for the prosperity and security of the kingdom and for good harvests, and men were prohibited from entering the walled enclosure.

TENCHIJI-AMACHIJI is still used for worship today, with important ceremonies conducted twice a year. Here as elsewhere in Okinawa, this *utaki* site is maintained and ceremonies are performed by priestesses called *noro*, or *kaminchu*. Local residents frequently leave offerings and practice devotions as well. It is notable and characteristic of Ryukyu castles that the highest and most prestigious location was devoted to spiritual rather than political or defensive purposes. In fact, some historians believe that the term *gusuku*, commonly used for castles, initially referred to a spiritual rather than a military stronghold. Please be respectful when visiting this and other *utaki*.