

The Old Path

Most features of Nakijin Castle were designed with defense as a priority. In the fourteenth century, the Hokuzan kings who built and resided in the castle had enemies and untrustworthy allies in the Chuzan Kingdom to the south. While open warfare was uncommon, it was always anticipated. Though Ryukyuan armed forces often carried simple firearms, they depended mainly on powerful and accurate bows, and battles were fought mainly on foot. Finely wrought swords, often imported from Japan due to the lack of iron ore in Okinawa, were used for close-in fighting.

The straight stone stairway currently used as the main route from the Heiro-mon gate to the upper precincts of the castle was not built until 1960. The original access route remained a mystery until excavations in 1980 revealed the existence of a steep, narrow, and rough-hewn stone path. This path weaves through bedrock outcroppings and was intentionally obstructed with large boulders to make approach difficult. It must be climbed single file, which would have made an approach difficult for large numbers of enemy troops. Nevertheless, Nakijin Castle was captured and burned by the Chuzan armies in 1416, partly through subterfuge and betrayal. It was again captured and burned in 1609 by an invading army of the Satsuma clan of Kyushu, which attacked with superior weapons and in overwhelming numbers.