

## **Katsuren: Other Points of Interest**

Okinawa does not have many large rivers, and so natural springs, known as *kaa* or *gaa*, were not only sources of water but played important practical and spiritual roles in daily life. There are five sacred springs within the walls of Katsuren Castle. All of them are sites of worship today. Please be respectful.

### **Miito-ugaa Spring**

This is known as the “matchmaking spring.” In previous ages, fetching water was one of the few occasions when young women were allowed to leave the house, and so secret trysts were often arranged here. The power of the spring to bring couples together is not to be abused, however. Legend says that splitting up after being joined here will bring misfortune, and affairs of love must not be casually discussed nearby.

### **Utamishi-gaa Spring**

This is known as the “forecasting spring.” It was believed to predict the coming year’s harvest based on the amount of water flowing on the Lunar New Year. A large amount of water indicated a poor harvest, while a small amount predicted a large harvest. As with many traditional beliefs, these predictions may have been backed by generations of experience.

### **Nakama-nuukaa Spring**

The Nakama family were blacksmiths (*kanjaa*) who made and repaired weapons in this area from the twelfth to the early fifteenth century. The spring is named for them, as they are believed to have used this water for their work. The exact location of their workshop, however, has not yet been determined.

### **Joguchi-no kaa Spring**

This spring’s name means “Gate Spring” or “Spring at the Gate,” and is located near the Nishiharaujo gate, which was used by people of low status when visiting the castle. These visitors used this spring to purify their hands and feet before entering the castle precincts. Rituals calling for good fortune for the village were also held here twice a year.

### **Machida Nakeeji-gaa Sacred Spring**

Unlike many traditionally revered *utaki* in Okinawa, this sacred spring is described in

historical records compiled by the Ryukyu royal court in the sixteenth century. This indicates that its high status and religious importance dates back at least three centuries. Prayers for peace are still offered here twice a year.