

Construction of Monumental Kofun Tombs

The centerpiece of Zone 2 in the museum is a detailed model of the tomb of Emperor Nintoku located nearby in the city of Sakai. The details of the model, based on data gathered from *kofun* excavations around Japan, show how the burial mounds were likely built and how their construction influenced life in the region.

The tomb has not been excavated, as it is considered sacred ground, but was likely built in the fifth century CE, and is believed to be the final resting place of Nintoku (traditionally 257–399), the sixteenth emperor of Japan. The mound resembles a keyhole in shape and covers a total area of about 32.3 hectares, making it the largest *kofun* in Japan and one of the largest tombs in the world. Some experts estimate that, given the technology at the time, it would have taken 2,000 people working nonstop for over 15 years to complete the tomb.

The model is 1/150th the size of the real tomb and shows the multiple tiers of the original construction and the three moats that surrounded it. Terracotta figures known as *haniwa* line the perimeter of each level and form a ring around the flat ceremonial spaces built at the summit and onto the sides of the mound. Smaller satellite tombs that surround the main *kofun* are shown in various stages of completion so visitors can better understand the construction process.

About 3,000 tiny human figures populate the landscape of the model, and each figure is unique. The model depicts scenes of daily life among the communities that lived and worked in the vicinity of the *kofun* during its construction, such as potters firing *haniwa* in earthen kilns, blacksmiths fashioning iron objects, and nobles hunting with falcons.