

【Outer Moat】

Moats are a common feature of Japanese castles, for which they often served dual roles as both defensive structures and waterways for transportation. Hikone Castle's three concentric moats were filled by a canal from nearby Lake Biwa. They were built as part of the castle construction and completed by 1622. In addition to providing the water for the moats, the channel between the castle town and the lake had numerous benefits for Hikone's economy. It opened up direct access to the lake, which was already widely used for the transportation of goods or troops, and allowed the Ii lords to enter and leave the castle by boat.

Hikone Castle's three moats divided the residents of the castle town into literal social circles: during the Edo period (1603–1867), a person's position in the social hierarchy was indicated by how many moats separated them from the castle. The castle complex and lord's residences lay within the inner moat (*uchibori*). The middle moat (*nakabori*) encircled official buildings, as well as the residences of the daimyo's top retainers and samurai who occupied administrative posts. Merchants and tradesmen lived within the outer moat (*sotobori*), and lower-ranking samurai and foot soldiers lived beyond it.