

Ōtemon (Main Gate)

Ōtemon is the castle's main gate and one of the oldest surviving structures in the fortress complex. The gate was constructed in 1628, when the castle was rebuilt by the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868), whose forces had destroyed it more than a decade earlier. The gate has survived many threats, including a lightning strike that burned down the galleries around the inner square in 1783. It has been designated a National Important Cultural Property.

The gate is a *kōraimon*—literally, a “Korean gate,” likely named for its resemblance to Korean-style architecture. In addition to the main gate roof, gates in this style feature two smaller, gabled roofs that protrude at right angles from the inner side, covering the gate's doors and protecting them from the weather. *Kōraimon* gates are commonly found in Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines in addition to castle complexes.

The pillars supporting Ōtemon's auxiliary roofs are worth a close look. Over the centuries, as the bases of the wooden pillars deteriorated, carpenters have removed damaged sections and replaced them with new wood, intricately connecting fresh pieces to the pillars using traditional joinery techniques. The joinery on the left-hand pillar (as viewed from the square) is especially elaborate.