

Dazaifu Diorama: Natural Defenses

Dazaifu was Kyushu's de-facto political and cultural center between the seventh and twelfth centuries. The city's location was carefully chosen to take advantage of the topographical features of the area. The diorama shows how the surrounding mountains and landscape formed a natural bottleneck, offering a strong degree of protection from would-be invaders.

Dazaifu's proximity to mainland Asia made it a major diplomatic hub. The city was the first port of call for foreign delegations who docked in Hakata Bay. However, the government feared that its proximity to the sea rendered the city susceptible to attacks from foreign forces, as in the seventh century the Asian continent was a place of political unrest. Thus, it ordered the building of Mizuki—a defensive wall with an extensive moat that stretched over 1 kilometer—to thwart potential attacks from the coastal plain where the city of Fukuoka is now located. Fortresses were constructed to provide further protection, including Ono Fortress on the top of Mt. Shioji. You can still see the remains of these defenses today.

When visiting dignitaries arrived in Dazaifu, they stayed in a special Guest House. The area outlined in yellow highlights this location. While the visitors were in residence, the Guest House was effectively an extension of their home country—somewhat similar to the case of foreign embassies today.