

Sakuradamon Gate

Sakuradamon Gate, completed in around 1620, is the largest remaining gate of Edo Castle. It is also the most famous in Kokyo Gaien because it was the location of an assassination referred to as the "Sakuradamon Incident." In 1860, Ii Naosuke, a feudal lord, was assassinated here by ronin samurai. The samurai were Imperial loyalists angered by the feudal lord's actions as *tairo*, chief minister of the shogunate, which they saw as diminishing the emperor's power.

Sakuradamon Gate comprises two gates. Behind a small, strong *koraimon* gate is a larger *yaguramon* gate. They stand at right angles to each other, creating an enclosed space. This is a square-shaped (*masugata*) defense gate. It forces intruders to turn at the right angle once inside, slowing them down and making them vulnerable to attack. The design was considered unbreachable and was very popular during the Edo period (1603–1867).

Archers and other soldiers would have occupied the *yaguramon* gate. They would have fired arrows and dropped rocks on any intruders breaching the *koraimon* gate.

The gate's high stone walls are built without the use of mortar. Stoneworkers fitted stones together seamlessly to make the gate impenetrable. The enormous stones seen in the gate—most of which came from the Izu Peninsula, about 100 kilometers southwest of Tokyo—would have been brought in by boat. Only the huge force of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 made an impact on this sturdy gate, shaking some of the rocks loose. Repairs have strengthened the gate's structure to prevent further damage. Sakuradamon Gate is a designated Important Cultural Property of Japan.