

Arima Christian Heritage Museum

This little museum is located on the way to the ruins of Hara Castle on the nearby coast. Hara Castle, which is now a World Heritage site, was the key battleground in the Shimabara Rebellion. The rebellion occurred when local peasants rose up against the lord of Shimabara, Matsukura Katsuie (1598–1638) because they were no longer able to endure the high taxes and religious persecution he imposed on them. Under the leadership of Christian samurai, a force of over 20,000 rebels held off a shogunate force of some 120,000 men for several months before the castle was overrun. Their defeat was followed by wholesale slaughter, and the castle was methodically demolished.

The events leading up to the outbreak of the Shimabara Rebellion are explained on panels in one of the museum's exhibits. Another standout exhibit is a very large model of the excavated remains of the area around the main gate of Hara Castle, complete with human bones nicked by swords and spears. In the same room are exhibits of crosses, rosary beads, and arquebus bullets, also from the castle grounds. In addition, there are medals that feature two great Jesuit saints—Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier—on each face. Since both men were canonized in 1622, these medals must have been smuggled into Japan and found their way to Shimabara long after the 1614 edict prohibiting Christianity.

A second room is devoted to the arrival of European merchants and the impact they had on Japan. Exhibits range from Gregorian-chant sheet music to a full-size printing press. There is also a subtitled video that explains the background of the Shimabara Rebellion.