

Santo Domingo Church Museum

This museum is tucked underneath a grand-looking primary school in the Japonesque style and accessed by a discreet doorway on the side road leading to the Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture. It is as archaeologically rewarding as it is difficult to find.

The Dominicans came to Japan from Manila in the Philippines. They built their first church at Shimokoshikijima, an island to the west of Kyushu, in 1602. They then dismantled it and moved it to Sendai on Kyushu proper in 1606. In 1609, they repeated the dismantling process, this time rebuilding it here in Nagasaki. It was made of wood with stone foundations, and was one of the very last churches to be built in the city. The 1614 edict banning Christianity also ordered the destruction of all churches, so Santo Domingo (named after the founder of the Dominican Order) had a lifespan of just five years.

The remains of the church were discovered in the late 1990s, while the school was being rebuilt. The design of the school was adapted to accommodate this museum beneath it. The first thing visible from the elevated walkway running through the site are the remains of the church's basement. Beyond is a stretch of Iberian-style stone pavement with drainage ditches on the right. Both features date from the early seventeenth century.

The church was replaced in the seventeenth century by the mansion of the Suetsugu family, who served as *daikan* (local magistrates) of Nagasaki for four generations. After that, the mansion of the Takagi family, who were magistrates from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, stood on this site. The well at the right of the walkway dates from when the Takagi family resided here.

At the end of the walkway is a small exhibition area. Of particular note are the excavated church roof tiles adorned with floral crosses (cross fleury). Other objects from the Santo Domingo period include Christian medals, crosses, rings, and rosary beads.

Nagasaki was ravaged by a terrible fire in 1663, and the displays include scorched plates and gray tiles turned a terracotta color by the heat. Everyday items ranging from Chinese cups and teapots to Dutch gin bottles, glasses, and plates were also found in the course of excavation.

