

Yokoseura Park

After an outbreak of violence between Portuguese merchants and local people in the port of Hirado in 1561 left 14 foreign traders dead, the Portuguese started looking for another harbor. The next year, merchant-turned-Jesuit-missionary Luis de Almeida secured the permission of Omura Sumitada, the local daimyo, to use Yokoseura at the northern end of the Sonogi Peninsula. As incentives, Portuguese merchants were granted exemption from customs duties for 10 years; additionally, an area of 2 leagues (11 kilometers) was given to the Jesuits, and non-believers were not allowed to live there without permission.

A church was constructed, merchants poured in, and Yokoseura soon became a flourishing port. In 1563, Omura was baptized in the church at Yokoseura, taking the baptismal name Bartolomeu and becoming the first Christian daimyo. But Omura's enthusiasm for Christianity antagonized other Omura retainers, and the anti-Sumitada faction took advantage of the strife to burn Yokoseura to the ground a few months later. The Namban (Portuguese) trade subsequently migrated back to Hirado, then on to Fukuda and finally, from 1571, to Nagasaki. Although Yokoseura flourished only briefly, it is an important place that was visited by prominent figures such as Japanese Mission Superior Cosme de Torres and Luís Fróis, a Portuguese missionary who wrote a history of Japan.