

Ryutan

Kaiki, a Chinese-born Ryukyuan court official, was ordered by King Sho Hashi to direct the construction of the large pond called Ryutan (Dragon Depths) in 1427. It is located on a flat portion of the slope below Shuri Castle, and the site was primarily used for the entertainment of Chinese envoys. Ryutan is fed from natural fresh water sources at the castle that flow through Enkanchi Pond. Kaiki studied landscape gardening in China, and directed the planting of flowering trees and the construction of an artificial hill near the castle.

Elegant Entertainment

Ryutan was the site of waterborne entertainment for Chinese envoys who came to Shuri Castle for the funerary and investiture ceremonies of Ryukyuan kings and for other celebrations. During the “Choyo-no-gi” festival, held on the ninth day of the ninth month, elegant and graceful Dragon Boat races were held there. The view of Shuri Castle reflected in the surface of the pond was well planned and duly celebrated in poetry. The pond was stocked with fish, and was therefore known as the *iyugumui* (fish pond).

Elite Leisure Spot and Public Park

Although Ryutan was reserved for the exclusive enjoyment of the royal court during the Kingdom era, it was a popular sight that was visible to commoners from the road. After Okinawa became part of Japan in the 1870s and schools were established nearby, it became more familiar to the general public. Now its cool wooded banks provide a needed respite from the Okinawan sun, allowing visitors to experience the prized landscape and the celebrated view of the castle against the sky.