

The Toba Castle Ruins

Toba Castle was constructed by Kuki Yoshitaka (1542–1600) atop a 40-meter-tall terraced hill at the mouth of the Myokei River. He was a privateer known for his prowess at sea, so it is fitting that his seat of power was surrounded by water on all sides. Called the “Floating Castle of Toba,” its main gate faced the sea, a unique feature not found in other Japanese castles.

The total area of Toba Castle was about 106,500 square meters. Its moats were made by diverting rivers, and it was connected to the city by a bridge at the northwest gate, with gates from the road on the western and southern sides of the castle grounds. In its prime, the castle had 13 buildings, including several baileys, a palace, and a grand, three-story keep.

Many families ruled the castle during the Edo period (1603–1867). Following the rule of the Kuki family, it was given to Naito Tadashige (1586-1653), a hereditary vassal of the Tokugawa family. The castle changed hands four more times before being given to the Inagaki family, who controlled it until the Meiji era (1868–1912), when castles throughout the country were put under state control. Many castles were destroyed, and Toba Castle was demolished in 1871.

Although none of the original buildings remain, there are many areas where the stonework of the walls has been well preserved. The ruins of the third bailey have been repurposed into Sannomaru Plaza, which now serves as the main entrance to the castle grounds. Other notable stonework includes the foundation walls on the south and west of the main bailey, and those at the former residence of the chief retainer.

The hilltop where the main bailey and keep were located is now Shiroyama Park, where visitors can enjoy a sweeping view of Toba Bay. The Toba Aquarium is on the east side of the castle grounds, and Toba City Hall is on the west side.