

Yonago Castle Ruins

For 270 years, the twin towers of Yonago Castle dominated their surroundings from atop Mt. Minatoyama. The castle was built in stages beginning in the late fifteenth century, and reached close to its final form in 1602 as the headquarters of the Nakamura clan. The site was unusual: a small promontory that jutted into Lake Nakaumi to the west and overlooked a fertile plain to the east that extended all the way to the foothills of Mt. Daisen. The Shinkamo River formed a natural barrier to the south, and wide manmade moats helped isolate the entire castle. The location was selected for defense against both overland and waterborne attacks, though it never had to face an enemy.

Unusual Dual-Tower Design

Like most Japanese castles, Yonago was laid out as a series of walled enclosures or wards called *kuruwa*, and the higher they were, the more security they provided. The *honmaru*, or donjon, occupied the intricately stone-terraced pinnacle of Mt. Minatoyama, 90 meters above sea level. A large five-story tower (*tenshukaku*) was constructed on top of the massive sloped stone walls that formed the highest terrace, and a smaller four-story tower stood atop a similar stone terrace a short distance away. This dual-tower arrangement was quite unusual, and gave Yonago Castle a unique silhouette. Although nothing remains of the wooden castle buildings today, the uppermost terraces present an abstract composition of stone walls, slopes, and stairs. The view from the highest terrace encompasses the bustling city below with its rivers and bridges, Mt. Daisen in the distance, Lake Nakaumi, and northward to the Sea of Japan. The upper terraces are reached by a 15-minute climb along picturesque winding paths and stairs.

Independent Enclosures for Defense

The layout of Yonago Castle makes inspired use of the natural topography in other ways. A smaller hill called Inoyama, separated from the Minatoyama peak by a deep gully, was surmounted by a separate set of enclosures and defenses that acted as a secure lookout against attacks on the main castle. Other rises and elevated outcrops were similarly fortified and connected with the main enclosures only by footpaths. The largest and most notable of these enclosures was the Naizen Maru. Named after an important military adviser, it spanned a long ridge about midway up the mountain, with a good view of the lake, the castle's lower levels, and the city. The Ofunade Kuruwa (ship harbor enclosure) housed a naval detachment, including wharves, boathouses, residences for sailors and boatmen, and related facilities. This was an unusual feature

for a Japanese castle.

Palace of the Lord

The lowest walled levels of the castle were the *ninomaru* (second ward) and the *sannomaru* (third ward). The latter occupied a wide area along the inner moat, and was separated into barracks, stables, rice granaries, a horse-riding ground, and offices for construction and other necessary functions. The *ninomaru* was laid out on two higher levels with high stone walls, guarded by a formidable gated enclosure called the *masugata koguchi* (square entrance). It was the site of the lord's palace, with several connected buildings for living, reception, and other functions, as well as courtyards and gardens. The perimeter of Yonago Castle was protected by a district of walled samurai residences located between the inner and outer moats.

A National Historical Landmark

Yonago Castle passed through the hands of several lords. The Arao clan administered the castle from 1632 until 1869, when the feudal system was abolished by the Meiji government and most castles, including Yonago, were ordered to be destroyed. The castle site largely reverted to nature, and was eventually made into a park with athletic facilities, while the adjoining samurai district became Yonago's main business and government district. The castle site was declared a National Historical Landmark in 2006; restoration work is ongoing.