

Former Residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the Kure Naval Base (Irifuneyama Memorial Museum)

The Former Residence of the Naval Commander-in-Chief is part of the Irifuneyama Memorial Museum, an open-air museum that was opened in 1967 to preserve Kure's history as an important naval base. The museum complex occupies a forested area and comprises several historic buildings that have been relocated to the museum's grounds, as well as a Local History Museum and a Museum of Historical Materials.

Prior to being occupied by the commander-in-chief's residence, Irifuneyama Hill was the location of Kameyama Jinja Shrine (est. 703), which enshrined the Shinto guardian deity of the Kure region. Shortly after Kure was designated a major naval base in 1886, Kameyama Jinja was moved about half a kilometer northeast. The Imperial Navy then built the commander-in-chief's residence atop this hill in 1890. The residence was continuously inhabited for 40 years, serving 32 successive commanders-in-chief through the end of World War II. Some of its more notable residents include Katō Tomosaburō (1861–1923), who became Japan's chief commissioner plenipotentiary to the Washington Conference and later served as prime minister, and Suzuki Kantarō (1868–1948), who, as prime minister, contributed to the final peace negotiations with the Allied Forces that brought the Pacific Theater of World War II to a close.

Under postwar occupation by the Allied Forces, the residence was used by the commander of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, which was headquartered in Kure. During this time, the entire building was remodeled to suit the Western tastes of its residents. The interior walls were painted white, and the carved transom panels (*ranma*) that separated the rooms were removed to make the space feel more open. The Allied Forces returned the residence to the Japanese government when the British forces left in 1956, and the building was finally restored to its original state in 1995 after five years of repair work.

Architectural Features

The residence was designed by Sakurai Kotarō (1870–1953), the first Japanese architect to receive official certification from the United Kingdom. It is made up of a Western-style wing in the front, for public use, and a Japanese-style wing in the back for private use. This eclectic design is characteristic of the Meiji era (1868–1912), when Western dress and formalities were adopted for public or governmental settings, but the domestic life remained unchanged. The exterior of the Western-style wing displays a half-timbered

façade, and the roof is tiled with natural slate in a fish-scale pattern. The interior has wooden floors and rare, gold-embossed wallpaper (*kinkara kami*) that was not discovered until the residence was renovated in the early 1990s. In contrast, the Japanese-style wing was built with traditional design elements, such as tatami-mat flooring and a windowed corridor (*engawa*) that runs along the outer edge of the house. The strict architectural separation that Kotarō created is especially noticeable at the door that connects the two wings, which resembles a traditional sliding door on the Japanese side but appears as a Western-style wooden door from the opposite side. The residence was designated a national Important Cultural Property in 1998.