

Alley Karasu Kojima

The area that is now Alley Karasu Kojima was once a quay used by the Kure Naval Arsenal, and many of its features date back a century or more. The granite ashlar seawall lining Kure Bay was built in 1895, and the brick walkway that leads along it passes three Red Brick Warehouses from the late Meiji era (1868–1912) and other structures from the early twentieth century. The park is also one of the few places in Japan where civilians can occasionally get a glimpse of active-duty submarines.

The name “Alley Karasu Kojima” refers to Karasu Kojima Island (literally, “small island of crows”), which itself is thought to have been named for the birds—likely seagulls—that once congregated there. A small island approximately 40 meters in circumference, Karasu Kojima Island was located in Kure Bay until the Taisho era (1912–1926), when the bay was filled to create a torpedo firing range.

Kure and the Imperial Navy were strongly influenced by British naval culture. An imperial decree in 1870 officially designated Britain’s Royal Navy as the model after which Japan’s own navy would be developed. As a result, the Imperial Navy and Kure Naval Base emulated British military traditions and architecture. This influence remains today, in the form of British architectural elements employed when rebuilding the dock area as a public space. The street running parallel to the wharf resembles the Japanese conception of an old English alley, and so the word “alley” was added to the name of the park.

After the creation of the naval base, Kure Bay was off-limits to civilians. Before World War II, the area functioned as a wharf for the Kure Naval Arsenal, and during the postwar Allied Occupation, it was used by the British Commonwealth Occupation Force. The wharf was finally opened to the citizens of Kure in 1985, when the city converted the area into a public park. However, the dock itself is currently used by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) and continues to be restricted to civilians.

Today, anyone can stroll through Alley Karasu Kojima Park. While walking along the waterfront, visitors will encounter buildings and other remnants of different periods in Kure’s history, including the Red Brick Warehouses, modern JMSDF destroyers and submarines, an old naval crane formerly used to lift torpedoes, and even decommissioned American artillery. The artillery had been produced for the American Civil War (1861–1865), but it had become obsolete by the war’s end. The Japanese government acquired

these outdated guns for a low price and repurposed them as the wharf's mooring posts. They are now buried muzzle-down along the pier.