

JMSDF Kure Museum (Whale of Iron Museum)

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) Kure Museum was established in 2007 with the aim of educating the public on the JMSDF's submarine and coastal-minesweeping activities. The museum is also called the "Whale of Iron Museum" after its main attraction, the *Akishio SS-579*, a decommissioned submarine that visitors can enter and explore.

The display on the first floor of the museum summarizes the JMSDF's development and its close relationship with Kure, which has been a major naval port for more than a century. On the same floor is the JMSDF Café, which serves authentic curry and rice (a navy staple) from the mess hall menu of the *Akishio SS-579*.

The second floor is dedicated to the JMSDF's minesweeping activities, which played a large part in reconstructing the country and opening its shipping lanes after World War II. Initially, Japan did not possess enough equipment for efficient minesweeping, and circumstances forced the JMSDF to sweep for mines using regular fishing boats. In certain cases, ships would even perform "kamikaze minesweeping" by intentionally ramming and triggering the mines. Today, the JMSDF disposes of mines using highly advanced tools, such as remotely operated aquatic robots, which are displayed in the museum alongside an exhibit explaining different types of mines. Another exhibit informs visitors about JMSDF cooperation in the efforts to clear the Persian Gulf of mines after the Gulf War (1990–1991).

The submarine exhibit, located on the third floor, covers topics such as the construction and development of submarines, the difficulties of everyday life on a submarine, and the training necessary to become a submariner. Other displays showcase changes in torpedo and antisubmarine technology, as well as the logistics of carrying out a rescue operation for a submarine in peril.

The third floor connects to the entrance of an actual Yūshio-class submarine, the *Akishio SS-579*, which was launched in 1985 and completed many missions before being retired in 2004. Two years later, the submarine was lifted to her current position using the country's largest floating crane. The teardrop-shaped vessel is 76.2 meters long, 9.9 meters wide, and weighs 2,250 tons. During her period of service, the sub accommodated 75 crew members. Walking through the submarine's narrow compartments, visitors can gain an understanding of just how challenging life as a submariner would be.