

Sakuranobaba Josaien

This area re-creates the bustling atmosphere of a seventeenth-century castle town, and is a great place to experience the food, culture, and history of Kumamoto. There are more than 20 restaurants (including branches of a number of famous old eateries) and food shops selling classic Kumamoto dishes. The three best-known local specialties are horsemeat sashimi (*basashi*), mustard-stuffed deep-fried lotus root (*karashi renkon*), and sweet-potato dumplings (*ikinari dango*). There are seasonal attractions too: ginger-and-*yuzu*-citrus tea, for example, is available in the winter, while a night market opens in the summer.

There is a covered outdoor stage in the middle of Josaien where a troupe of performers dressed as samurai act out an easy-to-follow and entertaining introduction to the castle's history. At the Kumamoto Castle Museum Wakuwakuza, visitors can enjoy exploring the history of the castle through virtual-reality tours and projection mapping. Cosplay aficionados can rent costumes in the museum lobby and visit the castle in the guise of a ninja, samurai, or young townswoman (*machi-musume*).