

Kumamoto Castle Museum Wakuwakuza

Wakuwaku is a Japanese word meaning “thrill” or “excitement.” True to its billing, the Kumamoto Castle Museum Wakuwakuza offers a fun, interactive, and child-friendly way to explore the history of Kumamoto Castle. Highlights include a 3D model of the castle, with projection mapping of the April 2016 earthquake showing how tiles tumbled off roofs and stone walls collapsed; a theater room showing footage of the battered castle immediately after the quake; and live camera feeds of the ongoing restoration work. An automated *kamishibai* narrated street-theater performance illustrated with paper cutouts takes viewers through the unsuccessful siege of Kumamoto Castle during the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, when rebel leader Saigo Takamori (1828–1877) famously said that he had been defeated “not by government soldiers, but by Kumamoto Castle itself.”

Upstairs is a large theater featuring virtual-reality tours of the castle (subtitled in several languages) and live performances of historical events. Hobbyists are sure to enjoy the model of Kumamoto Castle built of 75,000 plastic bricks by Japan’s only official Lego Pro-Builder. There are opportunities to pose for souvenir snaps throughout the museum—dressed as an Edo-era warlord sitting in a splendid palanquin, for example, or riding on a horse. Those who want to indulge in some serious time travel can even return to the lobby, rent a costume, and continue the tour dressed as a samurai, a ninja, or a young townswoman (*machi-musume*).
