

## **Aoba Castle Exhibition Hall**

Aoba Castle was the seat of Date Masamune (1567–1636), the first ruler of the Sendai domain and the founder of the city of Sendai. While the castle no longer stands, some foundation stones and sections of the castle ramparts remain. Aoba Castle Exhibition Hall is located on the castle site. The museum documents Date Masamune's life and legacy and depicts the castle through models, CG (3D) renderings, and VR (virtual reality) experiences.

### *Date Masamune*

Date Masamune was one of Japan's most powerful warlords, often depicted in his trademark black armor, wearing a helmet mounted with a large crescent moon. A formidable warrior and astute tactician, he helped Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) claim victory in the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, which put an end to centuries of civil war. Ieyasu then established the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868), the warrior-led government that presided over 250 years of peace and prosperity.

For his service Date was given control over an area in northeastern Japan that covered all of present-day Miyagi Prefecture, as well as parts of Iwate and Fukushima Prefectures. Masamune surveyed his new domain and settled upon a site to build a castle. He established his castle on a plateau facing the sea and vowed to build a peaceful and prosperous town.

### *Aoba Castle*

Little remains of the castle today except for some foundation stones and sections of the castle ramparts, but displays at the exhibition hall help visitors to imagine what it was like in the seventeenth century. A short video in the on-site theater uses CG rendering accompanied by Japanese commentary to describe the grounds and key buildings.

For a more immersive experience, rent a pair of VR glasses and enjoy a self-guided tour of the castle site. The tour includes eight locations, beginning with the exhibition hall. Here, visitors can see a virtually rendered bird's-eye view of the castle complex, which provides a sense of the scale of the original. Outside, visitors can stand among the foundation stones of what was once the Ohiroma (Grand Hall) and use the VR glasses to "see" inside the hall where Masamune held audiences with his retainers. The rendering of the interior is detailed, and includes decorative features such as painted screens. The

glasses come with an earpiece (for commentary in Japanese) and a pamphlet listing the VR locations.

*Exploring the castle site*

Walk among the foundation stones of the Ohiroma grand audience hall for a sense of the castle's scale. A nearby statue of Masamune depicts him on horseback in full battle armor with his signature helmet. Near the edge of the site, a sign marks the former location of a cliffside pavilion (no longer extant), with a sweeping view of the city.

Other facilities at the castle site include a gift shop, where festoons from Sendai's Tanabata Festival—the city's biggest summer celebration—are displayed year-round, and a cafeteria offering local specialties and refreshments. For more information about Sendai's history, visit the Sendai City Museum, a 10-minute walk from the Aoba Castle Exhibition Hall.