

## Stone Pagodas of Hinoshima

More than 70 stone pagodas in a variety of shapes and sizes dot the barren landscape on a projecting sandspit off the southern end of the small island of Hinoshima, next to Wakamatsu Island. Formerly covered by forest, the site was once a secluded cemetery where medieval traders and seafarers buried their dead, established monuments for comrades lost at sea, and even built memorials to themselves in anticipation of the same fate.

Most of the pagodas were erected between the late 1300s and the 1400s, when mariners from Goto actively engaged in trade and piracy along the coasts of the Korean Peninsula and China. These seafarers often sold their exotic wares to the nobility and other wealthy customers in Kyoto.

Goods bound for Kyoto were unloaded either in Wakasa Bay on the Sea of Japan coast or near present-day Osaka and Kobe. Many of the pagodas on Hinoshima are made of types of stone found only in these areas, suggesting that the stones likely arrived on the island as ballast loaded into trading ships for the journey back to Goto.

Judging from their shape and structure, some of the monuments are thought to have been acquired in one piece in mainland Japan and brought to Hinoshima, rather than being assembled on site. One common style of pagoda is the *gorinto*, a five-part structure in which each differently shaped part symbolizes one of the five elements that in Buddhism constitute the cosmos. The shapes and their corresponding elements are a cube for earth, a sphere for water, a pyramid for fire, a hemisphere for air, and a jewel for void. Another frequently seen type is the *hokyo-into*, a tower-like construction crowned by a stepped pyramid with a pointed finial on top.