

Fukue Castle

Fukue Castle was the last castle built before the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868) collapsed and samurai rule came to an end. Also called “Ishida Castle,” it is one of Japan’s few “sea castles” (*umijo*)—castles built facing the sea that were intended to control sea traffic or defend against a waterborne assault. When it was built, Fukue Castle was bordered by the sea on three sides, and its moat was filled with seawater.

The Goto family, lords of Fukue domain, had repeatedly petitioned the shogunate for permission to build a castle, but they were unsuccessful until 1849. At that time, the shogunate was growing increasingly concerned about foreign naval powers and the threat of invasion, and Fukue Castle was intended to shore up Japan’s maritime defenses.

Construction took 14 years, partly due to the domain’s limited financial resources. Another factor was the coastal location—workers could only carry out foundation work during low tide. There was also a shortage of skilled masons who could hew the precisely fitted stones needed for the castle walls. To remedy this, local masons were sent as far away as Hakodate, in Hokkaido, to learn the craft.

Following the shogunate’s collapse, the castle’s interior structures were demolished in 1872, a mere nine years after their completion. Even so, the outer defensive walls, moat, and stone bridges still stand, as do a villa and garden built in 1858 by domain lord Goto Moriakira (1816–1890). The Goto Tourism and Historical Materials Museum is also on the castle grounds.