

## Kushima Castle Site

Kushima Castle occupied a commanding position on a small peninsula jutting out into Omura Bay. It was the home of the Omura family from the sixteenth to nineteenth century, and the stone castle walls and moats are now part of Omura Park. The outer moats were filled in to form parkland, and the inner moats were planted with thousands of irises. The Itajiki Yagura turret was rebuilt in 1992 on the southern outer wall and is typical of a castle watchtower of the seventeenth century.

The castle was built in 1599 on the orders of Omura Yoshiaki (1569–1616), the first daimyo lord of the early modern Omura domain (*han*). Yoshiaki was given the title by imperial regent Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), then de factor ruler of Japan, for his support in Hideyoshi's campaign to conquer Kyushu in 1587.

On Hideyoshi's death in 1598, Yoshiaki took steps to maintain his control of Omura, anticipating the power struggle between the rival Toyotomi and Tokugawa families. He ordered the construction of Kushima Castle on Omura Bay, and moved his family from their smaller inland castle to this more fortified position after it was completed in 1599.

The castle was protected by a series of moats connected to the bay, including a four-meter-deep concealed moat on the north side, designed to slow down the approach of an enemy landing on the shores of the peninsula. High stone walls with wooden watchtowers provided further protection. The lord lived in a single-story residence inside the innermost walled enclosure of the castle.

The castle complex underwent significant changes in 1614 under Sumiyori (1592–1619), the second lord of the Omura domain. In 1607, he expanded the castle and strengthened its defenses with advice from veteran warlord and general Kato Kiyomasa (1562–1611). Kiyomasa had overseen the design of Kumamoto Castle, which was considered impenetrable, and later withstood an almost two-month siege in 1877.

The outer defenses of Kushima Castle were strengthened with stone ramparts that fan out to form a wide base in a style known as *ogi-no-kobai*. The shape added stability to the walls and made them difficult for attackers to climb. Extra turrets along the outer walls were likely added at this time.

Kushima Castle served as the home of the Omura family until 1871, when it was abandoned and razed after the rule of the Tokugawa shoguns ended in 1867. At the time, reminders of the shogunate, including many castles, were torn down as Japan began rapid modernization under the new Meiji government. Omura Shrine was relocated from an inland site to the castle grounds in 1884 to enshrine generations of the Omura family.

Kushima Castle was built to withstand potential attacks from land and water but was never attacked. In the end, it was defeated by the changing times.