

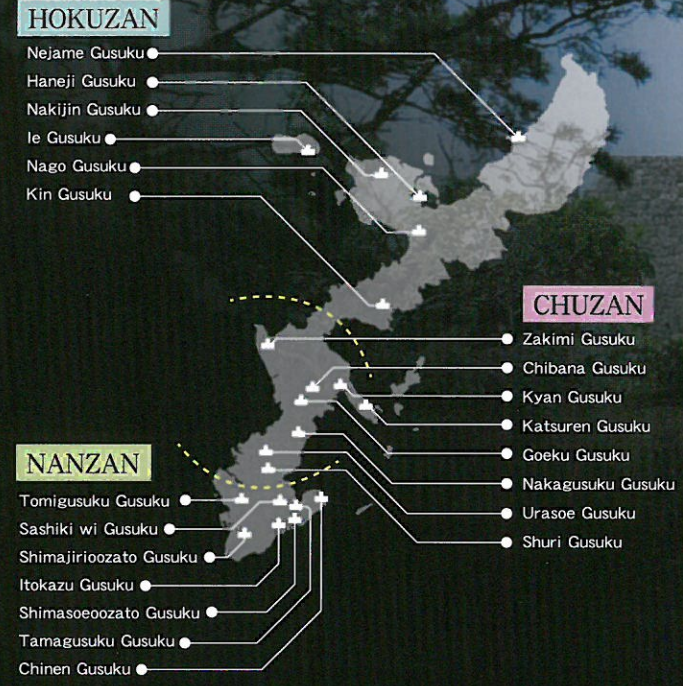


WORLD HERITAGE SITE
Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu
A National Historic Site



Zakimi-jô Site

Geographical Divisions of Sanzan and Major Gusuku (Castle) Sites



Chronological Table

	8C	13C	15C	17C	19C	20C	21C
Japan	Paleolithic, Jomon, Yayoi, Kofun, Asuka, Nara	Heian	Kamakura, Muromachi	Warring States, Azuchi Momoyama	Edo	Meiji, Taisho	Showa, Heisei
Okinawa	Paleolithic	Shell Heap Period	Sanzan, Gusuku Period, 1st Sho Dynasty	Early 2nd Sho Dynasty, Later 2nd Sho Dynasty	Okinawa Prefecture Period	US Occupation	Okinawa Prefecture

Annals of Chinese history dating back to the 14th century note that Ryukyu was once divided into three kingdoms, Hokuzan (northern mountain), Chuzan (middle mountain), and Nanzan (southern mountain), whose rulers vied against one another for supremacy. It was Sho Hashi, the leader of Chuzan, who finally unified the three separate domains into the Ryukyu Kingdom. Zakimi Castle was constructed during the years of transition between Okinawa's Gusuku and Ryukyu Kingdom periods.

YUNTANZA, THAT FAMED PORT OF CALL TO FLEETS OF TRADING SHIPS FROM ACROSS THE SEA.
TOLD THE OSHIAGEMARU WILL COME TODAY,
I RAN ALL THE WAY FOR THIS SHIP TO SEE. IT IS TRULY A THRIVING SEAPORT, JUST AS PEOPLE SAY.
WITH A HUNDRED TRADING SHIPS FROM NATIONS TO THE NORTH AND EIGHTY MORE FROM THE SOUTH,
IT IS INDEED A BUSTLING SIGHT TO SEE.

This poem appeared in Omoro Soshi, a book of Ryukyuan songs from the early 17th century. It describes the port of Yuntanza as a harbor filled with ships sailing in from all over.

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Zakimi-jô (Zakimi Castle) is believed to have been built in the early 15th century by Gosamaru, the Ryukyuan lord (aji) of Yuntanza, a figure renowned for engineering impenetrable fortresses. Gosamaru originally resided in Yamada Castle located about 4 kilometers northeast of Zakimi. In the year 1416 (1422 according to some accounts) he took part in the siege of Nakijin Castle, a.k.a. Hokuzan Castle, fighting on the side of Sho Hashi, ruler of the Okinawan Kingdom of Chuzan. They say when the dust of the battle had finally settled, Gosamaru chose Zakimi as the site to build his castle due to its strategic location. In 1944 the castle was used as an artillery emplacement by the Imperial Japanese Army. Following World War II, the Ryukyu government designated the castle an important cultural asset in 1956 only to see it turned into a radar station by the US forces in 1960. In 1972, the year the US returned control of Okinawa to Japan, the castle was officially designated as a historic site by the Japanese government. Excavation of the ruins and restoration of the castle walls began the following year and continued until 1985 with the aid of the Agency for Cultural Affairs and the Okinawa Prefectural Government. These efforts have breathed new life into the castle, a historic site now open to the public. On December 2, 2000, local villagers saw their long-held dream come true at last as Zakimi Castle was named a World Heritage Site along with the other Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu.

Zakimi Castle Ruins



① Two arched stone gates

While the inner bailey's arched gate (seen in the far back) is a replica, most of the outer bailey's arched gate (seen in the foreground) is the original structure restored.



Keystone (the outer bailey's arched gate)

The keystone used in the outer bailey's arched gate is triangular while the inner bailey has a rectangular keystone.



Meandering castle walls

Resembling a modern arch dam, Zakimi Castle's walls have stood the test of time even though the ground beneath them may be weak. The places where the curved walls meet made for perfect posts to look out for invaders.



② Ruins of a stone structure

The ruins of a stone structure measuring 16 meters wide and 14 meters deep were found on the grounds ringed by the inner wall. Since no roofing tiles were unearthed, the structure is believed to have had either a thatched or wood shingled roof.



Bird's-eye-view of Zakimi Castle ruins (areal photo)

The Zakimi Castle ruins are located atop a hilly landscape that is composed mainly of the Nago Formation, a reddish brown layer of soil lying about 120 meters above sea level. The castle is characterized by inner and outer walls, or baileys. An overhead view of the castle reveals how its thick, winding walls are connected to one another. Both baileys, including the walls, occupy 7,383 square meters. The castle walls stand about 13 meters at their highest point and about 3 meters at their lowest.



③ Stone lantern

This stone lantern was erected in 1843 (23rd year of China's Daoguang era) by order of Seifu (also known by his Chinese name, Mo Tatsutoku), Zakimi's highest ranking bureaucrat and decedent of Gosamaru (also known by his Chinese name, Mo Kokutei). Ensnconced within one of his castle's places of worship, the lantern was dedicated to the citadel's patron deity. It was a token of gratitude for his safe return home after serving as vice-envoy on the Ryukyuan mission to Edo (Edo nobori) that was sent to pay tribute to Tokugawa Ieyoshi, the 12th shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate.



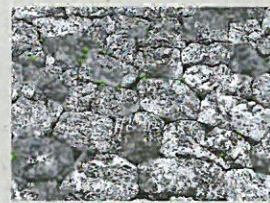
Spring (wega)

Although there are none within the castle walls, a number of natural springs dot the surrounding area. The spring located in valley to the east is believed to have been one of the castle's main sources of the water.

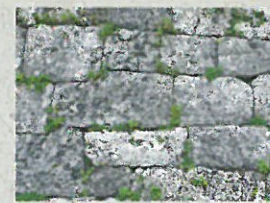
Aerial photo courtesy of Uejo Kogyo K.K.

Zakimi Castle Stonework

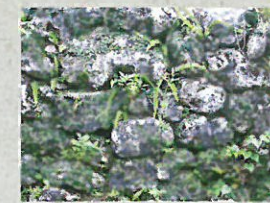
While a masonry technique called nuno-zumi was mainly used to build Zakimi Castle's stone walls, the aikata-zumi and nozurazumi techniques were also used in some of the work. Here you can see the main masonry techniques used to construct gusuku (castles) in Okinawa.



Aikata-zumi



Nuno-zumi



Nozurazumi

Restoration of Zakimi Castle Ruins

Outer bailey's arched stone gate



Before repair
[Photo taken in 1973]



After repair
[Photo taken in 2014]

Near the inner bailey's arched stone gate



Steps Unearthed after Excavation



The steps leading to the inner bailey, which were buried by the Imperial Japanese Army during WWII to build a gun emplacement, reemerged after the excavation.



Unearthed articles include Chinese porcelain (celadon, blanc de chine, and blue-and-white ware), brown glazed porcelain, gusuku earthenware, kamuyiki, old coins, iron nails, rice, barley, beans, animal and fish bones. These artifacts all date back to the 15th and 16th centuries and are believed to have been used for different purposes even after Gosamaru established Nakagusuku Castle as his seat of power.



Yamada Castle stonework (Onna Village)

Gosamaru is believed to have been born in Yamada Castle (located in what is now Onna Village) sometime in the late 14th century. According to legend, he dismantled the castle's walls and used the pieces to build Zakimi Castle. The Yamada area was once known as Furuyuntanza.



Tomb of Gosamaru (Nakagusuku Village)

It is believed that Gosamaru moved from Zakimi Castle to Nakagusuku Castle around 1440 and died during the Gosamaru-Amawari Conflict in 1458. His remains are entombed in a grave near Nakagusuku Castle.



④ Place of worship

Zakimi Castle had four places of worship, Ninogozen, Jonai-hinukan, Jonai-azanaishi-oibe, and Yunanza-jonai-no-tun. They have been relocated to the front of the outer bailey's arched gate.