

baluarte de **SAN DIEGO**

Welcome to the Baluarte de San Diego complex, the oldest in Manila, and a National Cultural Treasure of the Philippines. The complex is composed of two important structures: the ruins of the *Torre de Nuestra Señora de Guía* and the *Baluarte de San Diego* itself. In 1571, Spanish conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legazpi re-established Rajah Soliman's Manila as the new capital for the growing Spanish empire in the Far East. As the City grew in wealth and prominence in its new place in the world stage, the need for a stronger defense on the bay side became more apparent.

The first stone fort in Manila was commissioned by Governor General Santiago de Vera (1584-1590), who thought that a watch tower overlooking the Manila bay would best serve that purpose; while Jesuit priest Antonio Sedeño was assigned to oversee the project. The tower, named as the *Torre de Nuestra Señora de Guía*, was to be three tiers of circular walls, with the outer tier 28 feet high, 12 feet thick at the bottom, and 4 feet thick at the top. Built from 1586 to 1587, the tower, built on a foundation of sandy beach, threatened to collapse as it got higher. In 1590, Manila's wooden fortifications were rebuilt in stone; while in 1593, the upper portion of the tower was demolished, with the base integrated with the new spade-shaped bulwark, known as the *Baluarte de San Diego*. Completed between 1563 and 1663, the Baluarte became a formidable symbol of Spanish power in Manila. The durability of the Baluarte, however, was eventually tested. In 1762 it was breached by the British army during a siege of Manila, in retaliation against Spain's involvement with France during the Seven Years War. Manila was returned to Spain after two years of British occupation.

Realizing the defects of the Baluarte, it was restored and reinforced, but eventually abandoned after an earthquake in 1863. By then, siege warfare and the science of engineering fortifications were already obsolete. By the dawn of the 20th Century, colonial life transitioned from Spanish administration to American. To preserve the structural integrity of the decaying *Torre de Guía*, which still existed within the Baluarte, the American army filled it with deep layers of soil and debris, which eventually proved to be of further advantage, given that its hidden existence under meters of compact earth and rock saved it from destruction during World War II. The Baluarte was defaced, but the tower remained intact.

In 1979, the Baluarte was restored by the Intramuros Administration, while the ruins of *Torre de Guía* was excavated and stabilized, exposing it for the first time after being hidden for decades. The complex is currently being maintained as a public park, event space, and an archeological site. In 2014, the fortifications of Manila, including the Baluarte and the *Torre de Guía*, were declared by the National Museum as a National Cultural Treasure.



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