

Nagamachi District

The city of Kanazawa was once the economic and administrative center of the Kaga domain (feudal-era Ishikawa Prefecture). Its official founder Maeda Toshiie (1538–1599) and his successors enlarged the castle, and over the course of the Edo period (1603–1867) turned the surrounding town into one of the largest castle towns in feudal Japan. At its most prosperous, over 100,000 people lived here—a population rivaling Rome or Madrid at the time.

With the castle at its center, the town was designed with a view to both its defensive and economic aspects. Members of the upper classes were often given allotments of land for their residences close to that of the feudal lord (daimyo) in the castle, while commoners lived near the town's edges. Here in Nagamachi, relatively near the town center, middle- to high-ranking samurai had their homes. The name Nagamachi literally means “Long Town,” though probably it actually takes its name from the surname of a local family, the Cho, which means “long” and can also be pronounced “naga.”

Nagamachi's historical value lies in its unusual state of preservation. It has escaped large-scale fires, including the firebombing that damaged other large cities such as Tokyo and Osaka during World War II. Accordingly, it preserves many features from the Edo period: narrow streets, a drainage and water supply system that remains in use, and restored samurai houses. Many of these residences maintain their original earthen walls (*tsuchi-kabe*), which are still covered in the winter with straw mats to protect them from frost and subsequent cracking. A walk through Nagamachi, where an Edo-period atmosphere still lingers, offers a glimpse into the heritage of Kanazawa and Japan.