

This mountain peak is dotted with the ruins of Gifu Castle's gates, wells, and fortifications. The castle began as a fort, called Inabayama Castle by the Nikaido clan who built it. It was seized and occupied by various other clans during the Sengoku period (1467–1600). The castle was valuable because its occupant had control of the prosperous Nobi plain below. Many of the individuals and groups who occupied Gifu Castle expanded or renovated it, including the man responsible for giving Gifu its current name: Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), the first of the three great unifiers that consolidated political power in the lead up to national unification at the start of the Edo period (1603–1867).

Oda Nobunaga took control of the castle in 1567, and rebuilt it, improving its fortifications and building a new palatial residence. Nobunaga was interested in Western culture and technology, and invited Europeans to visit his castle. One of his guests, the Portuguese missionary Luis Frois (1532–1597) wrote that the upper area of the castle was accessible only to Nobunaga's trusted vassals—but also his guests. Frois also claims to have seen hundreds of people, including warriors, servants, and even hostages, within the upper castle. He described the castle's opulence in his journal, writing that the rooms were “decorated with screens painted with gold, with locks and fittings made of pure gold.”

After Nobunaga's death in 1582, the castle was ruled by Nobunaga's descendants and samurai retainers until its destruction in 1600 by the forces of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), who would soon after bring all of Japan under his rule.