

Inuyama Castle Town

The town of Inuyama evolved from a castle town during the Warring States period (1467–1568) into a prosperous merchant town during the more peaceful days of the Edo period (1603–1868). Today, people from all over the world visit the town to experience its well-preserved history.

When the original fortress was constructed in 1537, merchants and craftsmen moved to the area to serve the needs of the growing population associated with the castle. The town was later divided into 13 districts, with dwellings built along the main street surrounded by samurai residences, and the castle rising up on the horizon. The same grid formation used at that time exists even to this day.

The town's location on the Kiso River figured significantly in its prosperity. The fertile soil of the Kiso River delta, the transport of timber on the river to major ports, and a tax imposed by the lord of the castle on boats using the river all contributed to the town's robust economy in the early days. Continuing into the Meiji era (1868–1912), silk mills and other light industry flourished.

The town still looks much as it did during the Edo period. The main street, Honmachi-dori, which runs from the castle walls into the town, is still lined with low, wooden, tile-roofed merchant houses from that time. Some of the original shops are still in business, including Izumiya-kojima, a sake brewery established in 1597. The house of a kimono and tea merchant is now a small museum.

Fortunately, the town and the castle were spared during the bombings of World War II. More recently, other factors have contributed to the preservation of the town. City planners have made efforts over the years to keep the traditional feel by maintaining the buildings in their historic state, and by burying electrical lines along the Honmachi-dori and Uoshin-dori streets.

The traditional ambience can be felt during the town's biggest event, the Inuyama Festival, which originated in 1635 and is held during the first weekend of April. The parade is on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.