

About Matsushiro

Matsushiro is a historical castle town that is now part of the city of Nagano. The layout of the town is largely unchanged from the time of the Edo period (1603–1867), and many of the historical points of interest are easily visited on foot.

Origins

In the mid-sixteenth century Takeda Shingen (1521–1573), daimyo (Feudal lord) of Kai Province (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture), was expanding his domain northward into the Shinano region (present-day Nagano Prefecture). Here he met resistance from the forces of the Uesugi family of Echigo Province to the northeast. In 1560, to strengthen his position, Takeda built a castle at Matsushiro.

Originally named Kaizu Castle, it was well-situated for defense: The Chikuma River served as a moat along the castle's north side, and the nearby mountains formed a natural protective U-shaped barrier from the southwest around to the northeast.

Matsushiro in the Edo Period

Kaizu Castle changed hands several times in the run-up to the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603, then twice more before the shogun granted Sanada Nobuyuki (1566–1658) control of the region in 1622, making him the first daimyo of the Matsushiro Domain. The Sanada clan ruled Matsushiro for ten generations, until the daimyo system was dismantled in 1868 with the Meiji Restoration.

Renamed Matsushiro Castle in 1711, the castle was the center of power around which the town of Matsushiro developed. Outside the southern and eastern castle walls was an arc-shaped district where samurai and their families lived. Beyond this samurai district lived the merchants and commoners of the town. Another residential area for a second, lower class of samurai fanned further out toward the surrounding mountains. On the eastern edge of the town, the Sanada family temple of Chokokuji was built.

Through the generations of the Sanada clan's rule, additional temples and mausoleums were constructed within the town. Daiei Temple was built in 1622 by Nobuyuki for his late wife, Princess Komatsu (1573–1620). Her mausoleum is located here and is the largest and the oldest of the Sanada clan mausoleums. Sairakuji Temple is home to the mausoleum of Nobushige, third son of Nobuyuki.

The Matsushiro Literary and Military Arts School was established in 1853. Built just to the south of the castle, this school provided education for the male children of the samurai.

In 1863, after the Tokugawa shogunate's system of *sankin kotai* (alternate attendance) was eased and a daimyo's family members were no longer required to live in Edo, ninth Sanada daimyo Yukinori (1836–1869) built a new residence south of the inner castle grounds for his mother-in-law. Later this Sanada Residence (Sanada-tei) also served as the home of Sanada lords after retirement.

Matsushiro Today

Though much of Matsushiro Castle was dismantled at the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, many of the stone walls remain. Other aspects of the castle have been reconstructed. Around Matsushiro, structures and walls from the samurai district as well as several former homes of wealthy merchants still remains.

The Sanada-tei and its surrounding gardens stand behind the Sanada Treasures Museum, adjacent to the Matsushiro Visitor Center, a short walk from the former Matsushiro train station. The Matsushiro Literary and Military Arts School stands as the only one of over 250 such domain-run schools from the Edo period that has untouched almost completely in its entirety.

The road along which the merchants and commoners of the Edo period lived also remains, in the form of the town's main east-west thoroughfare and the stretch of Route 35 that runs north out of town.