

Matsushiro Onsen

Running beneath the town of Matsushiro are natural hot springs (*onsen*), which people have bathed in for hundreds of years. Matsushiro Onsen is popularly associated with the daimyo Takeda Shingen (1521–1573).

Between 1553 and 1564, Takeda Shingen's forces clashed with the armies of Uesugi Kenshin (1530–1578) in the Battles of Kawanakajima, not far from Matsushiro. It is believed that samurai who fought for Shingen may have soaked in Matsushiro's hot springs to relieve their fatigue and help heal their wounds. Although there is no definitive evidence, this belief has given rise to Matsushiro Onsen being called Takeda Shingen's "secret hot spring."

Two characteristics distinguish Matsushiro Onsen from other hot springs in Japan. One, it contains high percentages of calcium and iron, along with a high saline content that adds to the water's warming effects. Two, the water is colorless as it runs underground, but upon reaching the surface the iron in the water reacts with the oxygen in the air, turning the water a golden color. The iron slowly separates from the water, resulting in layers of orange residue that further add to the character of the baths.

The hot spring resort of Matsushiro-so, located near the eastern edge of town and run by the local government, offers both overnight guests and day visitors the chance to relax in these natural hot springs. Matsushiro-so is built in the image of a traditional one-story samurai house.