

## Osaka Castle Main Tower

With its gleaming white walls and blue-green roofs embellished in gold, Osaka Castle's main tower serves as an instantly recognizable symbol of the city. The current structure was built in 1931 and is the third tower to occupy the center of the fortress complex. The first, an impressive structure decorated with gilded tiles, was built in the late sixteenth century by Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1537–1598), then Japan's most powerful warlord. Hideyoshi's tower stood for just 30 years before it was burned to the ground in 1615 by the forces of Ieyasu Tokugawa (1543–1616), a one-time vassal of Hideyoshi who took control of Japan after his master's death.

Once the threat of the Toyotomi clan had been removed, the Tokugawa shogunate ordered the castle rebuilt. The second tower was completed in 1626, but it, too, burned down after being struck by lightning in 1665. By then, the countrywide struggles for ascendancy among rival warlords had been suppressed, and the shogunate decided that it was unnecessary to maintain the castle's defensive structures. Osaka Castle stood without its central tower for more than two and a half centuries.

The project to rebuild Osaka Castle's main tower was the capstone of a civic renewal and building program undertaken in 1931 by Mayor Hajime Seki (1873–1935) and funded by public donations. The project also included creation of the park surrounding the main bailey and the construction of Midōsuji Boulevard. The 58-meter tower is structurally modern, made from steel and concrete, but it sits on the same base of earth and stone that held it during the seventeenth century. From the outside, the building appears to have five stories, but there are actually eight floors, including a basement. In designing the exterior, architects aimed to evoke the grandeur of Hideyoshi Toyotomi's original tower based on contemporary illustrations. Between 1995 and 1997, the castle underwent a major restoration, during which the tower's entire exterior was cleaned and repaired, light fixtures were added, and the beams and columns were reinforced with steel plates and carbon fiber.