

Matsumoto Castle and Its Castle Town

The construction of Matsumoto Castle and its castle town began in 1590, the year Ishikawa Kazumasa (d. 1592) was appointed daimyo of the region. A modest fortification already existed on the site, but Kazumasa began the systematic construction of moats and multiple baileys surrounding a towering central keep. After his death, in 1594 Kazumasa's son Ishikawa Yasunaga (1554–1642) completed the Great Keep, the Northwest Tower, and the Roofed Passage.

By the late sixteenth century, warlords had shifted from building their castles atop mountains to building them on hills or flatlands. Mountain castles were easy to defend but difficult to keep supplied, whereas lowland castles could be easily supplied with food and armaments from the farms and workshops that surrounded them.

Because flatland castles like Matsumoto lacked natural defenses, they were often fortified by multiple concentric moats. For many centuries, Matsumoto had three such moats. The inner moat surrounded the main bailey (*honmaru*), which enclosed the castle keep, storehouses, and the Honmaru Goten, where the castle lord lived. The second bailey (*ninomaru*) lay beyond the inner moat, on a narrow curve of land where the Ninomaru Goten and other administrative buildings were located. The second bailey was surrounded by an outer moat, beyond which lay the third bailey (*sannomaru*). The daimyo's highest-ranking samurai retainers lived in the third bailey, separated from the unfortified parts of town by the outermost moat and a long earthen embankment that encircled the entire 39-hectare compound.

Commoners lived in the outlying areas of town, which were bordered by farms and the surrounding countryside. Movement between the different areas of the castle town was strictly regulated. The moats were spanned by narrow bridges, and traffic across them was controlled by guarded gates.