

Historic Matsumoto Castle

Matsumoto Castle's Northwest Tower, Roofed Passage, and 29.4-meter Great Keep were constructed in 1594. Today, Matsumoto Castle is the second-oldest castle in Japan and one of only five castles that have been designated National Treasures.

The castle is located in the main bailey, one of three baileys that made up the castle compound. At the time of the castle's construction, each of the baileys was encircled by a moat and a tall earthen embankment, dividing the compound into three concentric sections. The resulting complex reached all the way to the Metoba River (1.3 kilometers to the south) and covered some 390,000 square meters.

The main bailey is the innermost area of the compound. It was the location of the Honmaru Goten, an administrative building that doubled as the residence of the castle lord. Storehouses and additional administrative buildings were in the second bailey, and the third bailey contained the residences of the higher-ranking samurai retainers.

The nineteenth century saw many sweeping social and political reforms, beginning with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Japan's rigid class structure was abolished, and castles came to be seen as relics of a war-torn age. Over the next century and a half, Matsumoto Castle's embankments were leveled, most of the checkpoint gates were torn down, and one of the castle's three moats was almost completely filled in.

The castle's core structures would have been destroyed as well, but they remain standing thanks to the efforts of local residents. In 1930, the castle's two inner baileys and sections of the outermost moat (marked in red) were designated National Historic Sites, and they have been protected ever since.