

Northwest Tower (*Inui Kotenshu*)

The Northwest Tower is a wooden structure with three external stories and four internal floors that stands approximately 13.9 meters above the stone-wall foundation. Although the tower stands to the north of the Great Keep, its Japanese name is written with a character that means “northwest” (乾). The character for “north” (北) carries the association of “defeat” or “retreat,” so the keep may have been deliberately named to avoid these negative connotations.

The Northwest Tower connects to the Great Keep by the multistoried Roofed Passage. These three structures were completed in 1594, when Matsumoto was governed by the Ishikawa family. The castle layout creates a strategic advantage: ~~the entrance to~~ Matsumoto Castle is ~~located on~~ entered via the first floor of the Roofed Passage, between the Great Keep and Northwest Tower. This meant that enemy forces attempting to breach the castle doors would be exposed to musket fire on three sides.

Although built at the same time as the Great Keep, the Northwest Tower has some features that set it apart. In contrast to the square pillars of the Great Keep, many of the pillars in the Northwest Tower are round. The reason for this difference is unknown, but there are several theories: it is possible the pillars were reused from nearby temples; the builders may have taken less time to shape them in order to assemble the keep more quickly; or the team of carpenters who built the Northwest Tower may simply have been different from those who built the Great Keep. The pillars of the Northwest Tower have been roughly finished with an adze, creating a distinctive pattern that resembles fish scales.