The History and Preservation of Matsumoto Castle

Matsumoto Castle is one of the oldest castles in Japan, and its long history includes periods of prosperity and of decline. That history begins with the Ogasawara family, who built a fort on the site during the Warring States period (1467–1600).

   The original castle structures (the Great Keep, the Northwest Tower, and the Roofed Passage) were constructed by the Ishikawa family in 1594. The Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868) was established less than a decade later, marking the end of the widespread civil war that had characterized the sixteenth century. Matsumoto Castle became a center of local administration, and it was overseen by several different families in succession. Between 1633 and 1634, the Matsudaira family expanded the castle by adding the Southeast Wing and the Moon-Viewing Tower, creating a unique combination of peacetime and wartime architecture.

   Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, castles came to be seen as outdated relics of the country's feudal age. In an effort to modernize, many castles were torn down, moats were filled in, and the land was repurposed. Matsumoto Castle would have met a similar fate, but numerous individuals and organizations came to its aid.

   By the end of World War II (1939–1945), many of Japan's remaining castles had been destroyed by air raids. Matsumoto Castle survived the war, but it was damaged during a large earthquake in 1945. Major repairs were undertaken from 1950 to 1955, after the castle's cultural importance was recognized by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP). Matsumoto Castle was designated a National Treasure in 1952, and today it is one of only five castles to be protected under that status.

Castles Designated National Treasures:
Matsumoto Castle, Inuyama Castle, Hikone Castle, Himeji Castle, Matsue Castle

Castles Designated Important Cultural Properties:
Hirosaki Castle, Maruoka Castle, Bitchū Matsuyama Castle, Marugame Castle, Iyo Matsuyama Castle, Uwajima Castle, Kōchi Castle