

## **The History of Nihonmatsu Castle**

The history of Nihonmatsu Castle reflects the history of Japan's transition to modernity. From the high ground above the city, it saw the fierce conflict of the Warring States period (1467–1568) settle into the long peace of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868), which in turn was ended by the Boshin War (1868–1869) that cleared the way for the modern state.

### **A Mountain Fortress**

The first incarnation of Nihonmatsu Castle was completed in 1414. It was built by Hatakeyama Mitsuyasu, a local daimyo whose family had been sent to the region a century earlier as provincial deputies of the Ashikaga shogunate. Mitsuyasu's castle occupied only the very top of the mountain and was protected by walls of packed earth rather than stone, prioritizing defensibility over comfort.

The Hatakeyama family resided in the castle for more than a century, but were forced out in 1586 by Date Masamune, a powerful daimyo from the north. Conflict had long been simmering between the Date and the Hatakeyama, but the death of Masamune's father during a botched kidnapping by the Hatakeyama brought matters to a head. The Hatakeyama family recognized inevitable defeat and fled, torching the castle as they went.

### **Modernizing the Castle**

In 1590, Toyotomi Hideyoshi—by then the most powerful daimyo in Japan, well on his way to ruling the whole country—reassigned Nihonmatsu Castle to the daimyo Gamo Ujisato. Ujisato set about modernizing the castle, building the first stone walls around the *honmaru* (main compound).

After Hideyoshi's demise in 1598, Tokugawa Ieyasu established a shogunate that would rule Japan until 1868. In 1627, the shogunate

reassigned Nihonmatsu Castle to the Kato family of daimyo, and they continued Ujisato's project, building the stone walls surrounding the *sanno-maru* (outer compound) lower down the slopes.

### **The Niwa Daimyo and Beyond**

In 1643, the Tokugawa shogunate declared Nihonmatsu a domain and appointed Niwa Mitsushige as its first daimyo. Mitsushige began his tenure by remaking the town outside the castle walls along more orderly lines. The basic layout of the castle town is still preserved in today's Nihonmatsu. The Tokugawa era was largely peaceful, and Mitsushige and his descendants ruled from the castle for more than two centuries.

In 1868, an alliance led by powerful domains from western Japan took up arms against the shogunate in what was called the Boshin War. Nihonmatsu entered the war on the shogunate's side, but was helpless against the western alliance's modern weaponry and tactics. The domain was overrun

and Nihonmatsu Castle was burned down for the second time.

After the shogunate's defeat, domains and daimyo were abolished under the new Meiji government. The former grounds of Nihonmatsu Castle were occupied by a silk mill and then by a public park. Until excavation and restoration efforts began in the late twentieth century, little remained of the castle but a few half-buried stone walls. Nevertheless, the history of the castle shaped the city of Nihonmatsu in ways that are still being unearthed.