

Rinnoji Temple

Rinnoji Temple was founded in 766 CE by the Buddhist monk and saint Shodo (735–817). He had resolved to found a religious center at Nikko, and after studying Nara Buddhism, he endured great hardship before finally reaching Nikko. Over the centuries, the temple developed from its modest origins as a simple thatched-roof hut to a huge complex of beautiful halls and shrines. The temple received the patronage of the Tokugawa shogunate, which ruled Japan from 1603 to 1867. Today, the temple is one of the largest and most important religious institutions in the country. It includes the Taiyuin Mausoleum, a national treasure, as well as thirty-eight other Important Cultural Properties.

Two Shrines and One Temple

Today Nikko is home to the Buddhist Rinnoji Temple and two Shinto shrines, the Nikko Futarasan Shrine and Nikko Toshogu Shrine. In the not-so-distant past all three were united under a single leadership structure, known collectively as Nikkozan. Nikkozan combined both Buddhism and Shinto, a uniquely Japanese fusion of the two traditions called shinbutsu shugo. After the end of samurai government in 1867, the new government decided in 1871 to create a clear distinction between the two religions. It issued the Shinto and Buddhism Separation Order, which required all religious institutions in the country to affiliate with either Shintoism or Buddhism. Nikkozan, with its history of more than a millennium of fusion between the two belief systems, could not so easily choose one or the other, so instead, it was separated into three parts, creating the present system of Two Shrines and One Temple.

In 1999, Rinnoji Temple was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as part of “The Shrines & Temples of Nikko.”

Information & Multilingual translation

Audio guide & Text



Rinnoji Temple
— THE WORLD HERITAGE —



Multilingual translation

Ahead are signboards with QR codes. Use them to get information about Rinno-ji Temple. Scan the QR code with your smart phone or any other device to download information in many different languages, including English.

How to use →



Scan the QR code

Rinnoji Temple
Digital map



Nikkozan
Rinnoji Temple
— THE WORLD HERITAGE —

Multilingual translation
Official website



Rinnoji Temple
www.rinnoji.or.jp

English



Nikkozan
Rinnoji Temple

— THE WORLD HERITAGE —

世界遺産
日光山 輪王寺



❁ Nikkozan Rinnoji Temple

In addition to the Nikko City Sannai district, Nikkozan Rinnoji Temple complex also includes grounds in other locations such as near Lake Chuzenji and in Oku-Nikko.

The Sanbutsudo is the main hall of Rinnoji Temple, and other facilities such as the Daigomado Hall, the Treasure Hall, and Shoyoen Garden are also located nearby. In addition, other sites such as the Taiyuin Mausoleum where Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604-1651), the third Tokugawa shogun, is buried and the Jogyodo Hall are also located on the west side of the Sannai district.

In 1999, Rinnoji Temple was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as part of “The Shrines & Temples of Nikko.”

❁ Hondo, Main Hall

The Hall of the Three Buddhas is the main hall of the Nikkozan complex.

The hall was first constructed in the Heian period on the Takio Gongen site in the north side of Sannai by Ennin, known posthumously as Jikaku Daishi. After dismantled and reconstructed at a new site (current location of Futarasan Jinja Shrine) in the Edo period, the current structure was built in the second year of the Shoho era (1645) by Tokugawa Iemitsu, the third Tokugawa shogun.

It was then moved to its current location in the 14th year of the Meiji period (1881).

Inside the hall, there are statues of three buddhas, Senju Kannon, Amida Nyorai, and Bato Kannon.



❁ Shoyoen Garden & Treasure Hall

This Japanese garden is said to have been built by Kobori Enshu (1579-1647), a daimyo, tea master, architect, garden designer, and author, in the early Edo period.

The garden has a large pond at its center said to be modeled on Lake Biwa, one of the eight picturesque views of Omi (present-day Shiga Prefecture), and it features a path around the pond with various plants such as rhododendrons, azaleas, and maple trees to enjoy in the four seasons.

The Treasure Hall connected to the garden stores approximately 30,000 items from Nikkozan's 1250-year history, with more than 50 temple treasures on display for viewing.



❁ Jogyodo & Hokkedo Hall of Ascetic Practice

Built by Ennin, known posthumously as Jikaku Daishi, in the first year of the Kasha era (848) in an emulation of the Ninaido Hall at Hieizan Enryakuji Temple.

The building has a Japanese-style pyramidal roof, and there is a walkway between it and the neighboring Chinese-style Hokkedo Hall which connects the two buildings. This form is extremely rare, and currently the only two representative examples are Hieizan Enryakuji Temple and Rinnoji Temple.

The central object of worship here is a crowned Amida Nyorai riding on a peacock. The buddha statue dates back to the end of the Heian period and is a nationally-designated important cultural asset.



*Note: Hokkedo Hall is currently not open for public viewing.

❁ Taiyuin Mausoleum

Final resting place of Tokugawa Iemitsu, the third Tokugawa shogun. Iemitsu passed away at the age of 48 on April 20, 1651 at Edo Castle, while still the acting shogun. In accordance with his last request, the Taiyuin Mausoleum was constructed by Tokugawa Ietsuna, the fourth Tokugawa shogun, in just a year and two months.

There are 22 national treasures and important cultural assets standing within the grounds, and alongside the cluster of trees surrounding the site, they give it a solemn and dignified atmosphere.

The scenery changes as you pass through the various-sized gates for the four buildings, giving a sense akin to ascending to heaven.



❁ Daigomado, Hall for the Goma Fire Ritual

The hall where the “Goma Prayer” is performed. Goma Prayer is a ritual in which Buddhist practitioners use fire to burn away obstacles to their practice and make offerings to the Buddha which brings various benefits.

The building is constructed around statues of the five great wisdom kings (dating from the mid-Heian period) with Fudo Myoo at the center, and there are also enshrined statues of the seven gods of good fortune and sect founder, about 30 in total.

The Goma Prayer is performed several times per day here with the first ritual performed every morning at 7:30.



❁ Yakushido

Tokugawa Ieyasu was born into this world as an incarnation of Yakushi Nyorai, brought peace to the world, and was enshrined at Toshogu Shrine as Tosho Daigongen after his death. Yakushi Nyorai is a buddha who bring physical and spiritual health to people and peace to the world.

This hall is where the true buddha form of Tosho Daigongen, Yakushi Nyorai, is enshrined, and it is the largest building in the Toshogu Shrine complex. There is a large dragon drawn on the ceiling, and due to the beautiful bell-like echo produced by wooden clappers hit underneath it, the dragon is widely known as the “Roaring Dragon.”

