**A Pure Mind in a Pure Body**

The origins of Amidaji Temple are intricately entwined with Todaiji Temple in Nara. Founded in the eighth century, and long the most important Buddhist institution in Japan, Todaiji was destroyed in 1180 during a clan war. Rebuilding proceeded rapidly, and the Great Buddha statue was fully restored by 1185. Reconstructing the hall that housed the statue demanded a vast amount of timber, so Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127–1192) sent Shunjobo Chogen (1121–1206), the monk in charge of rebuilding work, to Yamaguchi to cut down and ship back 130 enormous trees.

Chogen arrived in Yamaguchi in 1186 and established Amidaji as a branch temple of Todaiji in the following year. The temple’s role is to pray for the health and well-being of the emperor. Chogen had visited China to study Buddhism, and Amidaji reflects the religious innovations he encountered there. Both the *Amida Nyorai*—the main deity in Pure Land Buddhism after whom the temple is named—and *yokuto nenbutsu*—bathing as a form of self-purification—are imports from China. The complex consists of seven buildings (two of which are for bathing) set in a mountainside garden full of hydrangeas and is home to several National Treasures.