**Sanmon Gate**

You are standing at the Sanmon, the main gate of Zojoji Temple. In Jodo Pure Land Buddhism, anyone passing through this gate is cleansed of the three worldly afflictions of greed, anger, and ignorance. This gate was actually the inner gate. You can see the original main gate if you look directly back down the street behind you.

Formally called the Sangedatsumon, it was built in 1622 by the chief carpenter to the shogun and is the only remaining original temple building. It is one of the oldest wooden structures in Tokyo and is an Important Cultural Property.

The elaborate construction style, with a ridged, hip-and-gable roof above a lower pent roof on the four sides of the lower part, was introduced from China around the sixth century, around the same time Buddhism arrived in Japan. The simpler design of the balustrade reflects a more Japanese style. The bright vermillion lacquered exterior was one of the most famous landmarks in Edo (now Tokyo).

The second floor, which is closed to the public, enshrines a statue of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, flanked by two bodhisattvas and 16 arhats, the most dedicated of Buddha’s disciples, all dating from the Edo period (1603–1867). Visitors may note the lack of the two Nioguardian statues, whose fierce visages frighten off the unworthy, that are usually found at the entrance of a Buddhist temple. This is because the Jodo (Pure Land) Buddhism practiced at Zojoji was founded to spread Buddhism to the masses. Salvation is thought to be attainable by anyone who chants the words, “Namu Amida Butsu” (I take refuge in Amida)—a practice known as *nenbutsu*.

A ten-year restoration project of the gate is scheduled to begin in April 2025.