

Long ago, the nearby ocean eroded the soft volcanic rock of the hills around Matsushima, creating caves. These caves became a popular place to carve Buddhist memorial markers for deceased relatives. The oldest visible caves date from the seventeenth century, but evidence of grottoes from as early as the twelfth or thirteenth century have been found in lower layers of rock that are now hidden by soil.

In the past, six small independent temples stood on each side of the *sando* approach to Zuiganji. For a modest donation, a visitor could access the caves behind the temples and leave a carving or a memorial stone.