

Chuzenji Temple

This temple is one of the oldest in Nikko and was first constructed in 784 CE by the holy ascetic Shodo (735–817). Originally a place for ascetic practice, this affiliate temple of Rinnoji Temple is best known today for the Tachiki Kannon, a six-meter tall wooden statue of Senju Kannon, the thousand-handed bodhisattva of mercy, which is enshrined here. Carved by Shodo himself more than twelve hundred years ago, it is the oldest surviving statue at Nikko and is designated as an Important Cultural Property.

When Chuzenji Temple was originally constructed, it was located at the base of Mt. Nantai where Nikko Futarasan Chugushi Shrine now stands. The temple served as the starting point for pilgrimages to the top of Mt. Nantai. However, in the Meiji period (1868–1912), a great landslide swept down the mountain and carried the temple and the Tachiki Kannon into the lake. Miraculously, the ancient statue survived the disaster, rising to the surface and was washed up on the shore a few hundred meters away. The temple was rebuilt at this location which was believed to have been chosen by the Kannon.

Niomon Gate

The main approach to the Chuzenji is protected by a large red gate called the Niomon Gate, after the two statues of crimson Nio guardian deities it houses. Their fierce expressions and muscular bodies ward off evil spirits. Similar gates can be found at temples and some shrines all across Japan.

Hashiri Daikokutendo Hall

The Hall of the Running Daikokuten, or Hashiri Daikokutendo, is at the far end of the main approach to the Kannon Hall. It is named after the spirit that helped Shodo reach the summit of Mt. Nantai. According to legend, Shodo tried and failed twice to reach the summit. Before his third attempt, as he prayed fervently on the shores of Lake Chuzenji, suddenly the deity Daikokuten appeared running across the water's surface. With the help of the deity, Shodo succeeded in reaching the summit, which is why the Hashiri Daikokuten was enshrined here.

Hondo Main Hall

The Main Hall, or Hondo, enshrines the Tachiki Kannon. Shodo is said to have carved this massive statue after seeing a golden figure of Kannon above the lake. Inspired, he carved the statue in one piece from the living trunk of a massive katsura tree, which is why the statue is called Tachiki, or “standing tree.” This Kannon has eleven faces and a thousand arms. The Eleven-Faced Thousand-

Handed Kannon presents a different face depending on the type of supplication made, while the thousand arms represent the many different abilities which the goddess possesses to help humanity.

Godaiddo Hall

Located on the hillside above the Main Hall, this building enshrines statues of the five wisdom kings, the deities who guard the teachings of Buddhism. The central figure is Fudo Myoo, who protects ascetics by cutting away worldly desires with his sword; the other four defend the four cardinal directions. The ceiling of the hall is decorated with a magnificent dragon by the famous artist Katayama Nanpu (1887–1980), who also restored the dragon painted on the ceiling of the Yakushido Hall at the Toshogu Shrine. The Godaiddo Hall has a spectacular view over Chuzenji Lake and the surrounding mountains.