

Jindoji Temple

Jindoji Temple is a small Buddhist temple located in a quiet town. This is an area where mountain Buddhism has prospered, and practitioners of Shugendo, a type of Japanese mountain asceticism that incorporates both Shinto and Buddhist concepts, have long had power and influence. Apparently, Jindoji was an important center for Shugendo practices during the Heian period (794–1185). The Main Hall is an Important Cultural Property of Japan. Behind this building is a repository of various consecrated Buddhist statues that are also Important Cultural Properties. Jindoji Temple's grounds are famous for their scenery, which is beautiful in any season. Every year on the second Sunday of September, the temple holds its largest service where the *goma* fire ritual is performed and practitioners walk over hot coals.

History

There are many theories about the origins of Jindoji Temple, and exact details are unknown. However, it is thought that the temple was established in 596 by Prince Shotoku (574–622), a regent who ruled Japan from 594 to 622. He was also a strong supporter and promoter of Buddhism, which had only recently been introduced to Japan at the time of his rule, incorporating some of the religion's tenets into his edicts and laws. The name Shotoku was bestowed upon him after his death in praise of his virtue and merit.

En no Gyoja is the ascetic and mystic held to be the founder of a type of mountain asceticism unique to Japan called Shugendo. In 675, Jindoji Temple legend says that En no Gyoja visited this temple to further his training. It was then that two divinities, in the shape of children, appeared before him. En no Gyoja was so awed that he carved a statue of Zao Gongen, a deity that is central to Shugendo. It was enshrined at this temple, which was then named Jindokyogokokuji Temple. It is by this act that mountain asceticism is said to have spread to the area, making this temple an important center for Shugendo practitioners.

In the late Heian period (1177–1181), war brought about many fires that destroyed numerous structures in the area, after which the temple fell into disuse. The Zao-do Hall that enshrines a statue of Zao Gongen was rebuilt in 1406 and continues to serve as the Main Hall today.

As Japan industrialized in the Meiji period (1868–1912), the Japanese government declared the separation of Buddhist and Shinto religious facilities and suppressed Shugendo as an inappropriate mixture of the two religions. Following World War II, with the passing of the 1947 Constitution, freedom of religion was guaranteed in Japan, and followers of Shugendo were once again free to openly practice their faith.

Treasures and Artifacts

Jindoji Temple has several Important Cultural Properties. These include its Main Hall, which was built in 1406, and the many consecrated Buddhist statues in its reliquary. The reliquary is a veritable Heian-period museum exhibit with several awe-inspiring statues from that era (794–1185) on display. Visitors can walk past the fire pit behind the Main Hall used for the *goma* fire ritual, enter the reliquary, and view Buddhist statues such as the Seated Aizen Myo-o, the Standing Fudo Myo-o, the Seated Amida Nyorai, and the Standing Nikko and Gakko Bodhisattvas.