

Gansenji Temple

Gansenji Temple is located in the quiet mountain city of Kizugawa, Kyoto. Embraced on all sides by mountain forest, the temple grounds burst into bloom in the spring and summer with camellias, plum blossoms, cherry blossoms, hydrangeas, and water lilies. This has earned the temple the nickname “Temple of Flowers.” It is particularly well-known for its hydrangeas of which there are over thirty varieties and five thousand plants. The connection to hydrangeas is so deep that a hydrangea symbol is carved into the sign at the temple gate. Because the base of the temple’s Three-storied Pagoda, an Important Cultural Property, is located at the foot of a hill, its top can be viewed up close from the hilltop. The temple’s principal deity, a nearly 3-meter tall wooden statue of Amida Nyorai, is thought to be the oldest of its kind.

History

According to temple legend, Gansenji traces its origins to 729 when, by imperial edict, a Buddhist priest named Gyoki, famous for his work of spreading Buddhism to the common people, established the temple. This temple is said to have been named Gansenji in 813 by Emperor Saga (786–842), who expanded the temple complex, building structures to give thanks for the birth of his male heir. At its most prosperous, the complex is believed to have stretched nearly one kilometer in all directions with a total of thirty-nine structures. Unfortunately, these were all destroyed in the fires of war in 1221.

In 1442, the three-storied pagoda was constructed and remains to this day. The main hall and principal deity were restored in the Edo period (1603–1868) via a donation from the Tokugawa family, the ruling clan of Japan at the time. The current main hall was rebuilt in 1966.

Treasures and Artifacts

Gansenji Temple has several Important Cultural Properties in its main hall and in the temple grounds. Perhaps the best-known are its principal deity, a nearly 3-meter tall wooden statue of the Amida Nyorai, the Lord of the Western Paradise, and its Three-storied Pagoda. Around the temple grounds are also many Important Cultural Properties made of stone, as the surrounding area is known for its quality granite.