

TITLE: Daimon

The Daimon, or Great Gate, stands at the western entrance to Koyasan. This massive wooden gate traditionally represented the official entrance to the Danjo Garan Sacred Temple Complex and the Koyasan plateau. After the original *torii*-style gate was destroyed by fire, the Daimon was constructed here in 1705.

Similar gates mark the entrance to many Japanese Buddhist temples. However, while most *daimon* face south, Koyasan's great gate faces west, in the direction of the Pure Land Buddhist paradise—and China, where Koyasan's founder, Kobo Daishi (774–835), also known as Kukai, studied Shingon Buddhism before bringing esoteric Buddhist teachings back to Japan. The Daimon also faces the Japanese island of Shikoku, Kobo Daishi's birthplace and the location of an important Shingon Buddhist pilgrimage route that circles the island, passing through eighty-eight temples along the way.

The two-tiered wooden gate stands 25.1 m high. Three large wooden plaques on the upper tier display three characters that, together, read “Koyasan.” The upper level of the gate also contains colorful depictions of waves, representing the hope that both the gate and Koyasan will never again be destroyed by fire.

Two massive statues of *nio*, or guardian kings, stand in the bays on either side of the Daimon. These statues serve as guardians of Koyasan and are among the largest *nio* statues remaining in Japan, second only to the massive pair in the Great South Gate of Todaiji Temple in Nara. On the pillars between the statues, two wooden plaques display inscriptions in classical Chinese expressing that “each morning, Kobo Daishi emerges from his meditation to watch over Koyasan and help bring peace,” emphasizing the Shingon Buddhist belief that Kobo Daishi remains in eternal meditation for the benefit of Koyasan and all people, both in Japan and around the world.