

## **TITLE: The History of Koyasan**

Koyasan is a sacred plateau located on a mountain more than 800 m above sea level, and it serves as a spiritual center for the study and practice of Shingon esoteric Buddhism. Founded by the Japanese priest Kobo Daishi (774–835), originally known as Kukai, over twelve centuries ago as the headquarters of Koyasan Shingon Buddhism, Koyasan remains an active center of Buddhist worship, study, and meditation to this day. In 2004, Koyasan was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as part of the Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range.

In addition to the sacred temple complex of Danjo Garan, Koyasan is home to 117 Shingon temples, the Nyonin Michi (Women's Pilgrimage Route) that circles the Koyasan plateau, and the holy cemetery of Okunoin, which is also the site of Kobo Daishi's mausoleum (*Gobyō*).

Kobo Daishi learned the teachings of esoteric Buddhism while studying in China. Upon his return to Japan in 806, he established the sect now known as Koyasan Shingon Buddhism and searched for a place to construct a center for esoteric Buddhist training and practice. Legend says that just before leaving China, Kobo Daishi threw his *sankosho* (a double-ended, three-pronged ceremonial scepter) toward Japan. Upon reaching Japan, he searched for the scepter and, with the assistance of the Shinto deities who inhabited this holy mountain, located the *sankosho* in the branches of a pine tree on Koyasan. This famous tree still grows near the Miedo, or Great Portrait Hall, of Danjo Garan.

In 816, the Emperor Saga (786–842) granted Kobo Daishi permission to establish Koyasan. Although construction commenced that year, Kobo Daishi entered eternal meditation in 835, before completion of the temple complex. Thereafter, his disciple and successor, Daitoku Shinzen, along with a number of other disciples, spearheaded the effort to complete the grand Danjo Garan complex that Kobo Daishi had envisioned. Today, it is believed that Kobo Daishi remains in eternal meditation at his mausoleum (*Gobyō*) in Okunoin, praying for the peace and prosperity of Japan and the enlightenment of people around the world.