

Nikko-zan Rinnoji Temple

The renowned Buddhist monk and mountain ascetic Shodo Shonin (735–817) was the founder of Shihonryuji Temple, the predecessor of Nikko-zan Rinnoji Temple. Rinnoji is now part of the shrine-temple complex at Nikko that includes Toshogu Shrine and Futarasan Jinja Shrine. The entire complex is designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Religious practice at Nikko was a syncretic mix of Buddhism, Shinto, and Shugendo from as early as the eighth century. This mixture of religious thought was common in Japan until 1868, when a government decree ordered the separation of Shinto and Buddhism. As a result of the decree, in 1871 Rinnoji Temple became the only Buddhist temple at Nikko.

Many of Nikko's most important properties are part of the Rinnoji Temple complex. Huge, gilded statues of the three principal deities of Nikko are enshrined in Rinnoji's Three Buddha Hall, or *sanbutsudo*. Taiyuin Mausoleum, the magnificent final resting place of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu (1604–1651), is also part of Rinnoji Temple.