

## **Kan'eiji Temple: Kiyomizu Kannondo**

Kiyomizu Kannondo is one of the few Buddhist structures in Ueno Park that date back to the latter half of the 1600s, when this entire area was part of the vast grounds of Kan'eiji Temple. Kan'eiji had close ties to the ruling Tokugawa shogunate, making it one of the most prosperous and influential temples in Edo (present-day Tokyo) at the time. It was a symbol of Edo's status as the de facto capital of Japan and the rightful successor of Kyoto, the ancient seat of the imperial court, as ruler of the country. To underline this heritage, Tenkai (1536?–1643), the influential Buddhist priest who founded Kan'eiji, chose to recreate several of Kyoto's iconic structures at his own temple. Kiyomizu Kannondo is one of those buildings, modeled on the eighth-century Kiyomizu Temple, now a World Heritage site famed for its hillside veranda.

Kiyomizu Kannondo was first built in 1631, but was moved to its current location in 1694 to make way for Kan'eiji's main hall, erected on the site that is now occupied by Ueno Park's central fountain. Both Kiyomizu Kannondo's original location and its current site were chosen for their supposed resemblance to the hillside on which Kiyomizu Temple stands in Kyoto. Housed within the hall is a seated statue of Senju Kannon, the thousand-armed bodhisattva of compassion, which also came from Kyoto's Kiyomizu Temple. Donated to Kiyomizu Kannondo, the statue is said to date from the Heian period (794–1185) and is displayed to the public on one day in February every year. Visible every day is a statue of Kosodate Kannon, the protector of children and childbirth, to whom new parents offer a doll after the birth of a child. After saying their prayers, visitors can look out from the hall's veranda and admire the Tsuki no Matsu ("Moon Pine"), a pine tree whose trunk has been curved to form a circle. It was planted in 2012 to recreate a tree of the same shape that grew here in the Edo period (1603–1868) and is depicted in a famous ukiyo-e woodblock print by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858).