

## **Five-Story Pagoda (Goju no To)**

The Five-Story Pagoda is the oldest pagoda of this type in Japan and one of the oldest surviving towers built of wood in the world. It was erected during the Asuka period (593–710) to enshrine sacred relics of the Buddha. The bones and ashes of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, were distributed among his followers after he died some 2,500 years ago. A portion of these remains are said to be buried several meters below the base of the pagoda today. The base displays a series of four tableaux depicting scenes from the Buddha's life. On the north side, he is depicted passing into nirvana, mourned by his disciples.

The pagoda's approximately 32.5-meter-tall central pillar is made of a Japanese cypress tree felled in 594. It runs through each of the box-like structures that make up the tower's five independent tiers. The pagoda's tiers use flexible wooden joints, helping the structure absorb the seismic energy of Japan's countless earthquakes.

Note the scythes attached to the upper roof of the pagoda. Lightning was once considered a celestial monster, so swords and implements with sharp edges were added to this pagoda; it was believed that this would prevent creatures from the sky from alighting on them. These are rarely seen on other pagodas and are considered one of the "seven mysteries" of Horyuji. The pagoda was struck by lightning during the Kamakura period (1185–1333), but was unharmed. After that, talismans were hung on each level and four sickles were attached below to protect against future strikes. Today lightning rods protect the building.

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