

Middle Gate

The magnificent Middle Gate marks the entrance to the inner temple area where the pagoda and main hall are located. Two fierce guardian deities known as Kongo Rikishi flank the gate, which was erected to protect the temple. These are Japan's oldest clay sculptures. They have now stood guard over the gate for more than a thousand years.

Within the gate there are in fact two entrances to the Western Precinct. They stand side by side, forming what is known as a "split entrance." The entrance is said to reflect the positioning of the buildings within the precinct. Unlike most temples of that time, in which the buildings stood in a straight line, one behind the next, here, the Main Hall and the Five-Story Pagoda stand side-by-side, mirrored by the gate's split entrance design. Another feature of the gate is its eaves-supporting bracket complexes, designed to disburse the weight of the massive roof through three multiple supporting columns.