

## **West Pagoda**

Yakushiji was Japan's first temple to feature a pair of pagodas, with the West Pagoda (Saito) built to flank the Main Hall in symmetry with the East Pagoda. The West Pagoda is thought to have been originally erected at the time of the temple's founding, but was destroyed by fire in 1528. In 1981, it was rebuilt in the style of the Hakuho period (645–710). The brilliant red and green colors stand in contrast to the weathered hues of the East Pagoda and give an idea of how the older pagoda must have looked in its original glory.

Pagodas derive from stupas, white domed structures topped by a finial that were first constructed in ancient India and served as monuments housing important relics, including bone fragments of the Buddha. The two pagodas at Yakushiji house eight recently made dioramas depicting scenes from the life of Shakyamuni. While the East Pagoda's diorama shows scenes from his early years, the West Pagoda starts from the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment when he was 35, following him until his death at age 80. The tableaux were made from bronze by sculptor Nakamura Shin'ya (b. 1926), a recipient of Japan's Order of Culture who is known for his highly spiritual works. The first of the four scenes shows Shakyamuni achieving enlightenment. The second depicts his first sermon at Sarnath, India, and the start of 45 years of teaching; while the third shows his death, when he entered Nirvana. The final scene depicts his funeral and the dividing up of his bones among his followers and their placement into eight urns, which according to legend are interred within the grounds of temples around India and Sri Lanka.