

## **Central Gate**

The Central Gate marks the entrance into a more sacred area of the temple complex. While the Gate of Guardian Kings represents the entrance of the Ninnaji complex as a whole, the Central Gate leads into the area of the Five-Tiered Pagoda and Kannondo Hall. At one time the monks' residences were located beyond this gate as well; the area between it and the Gate of Guardian Kings was a more general space open to commoners and clergy alike. This division between sacred and mundane shifted, however, after much of Ninnaji burned down during the Onin War (1467–1477). During the reconstruction, some buildings were moved to the outside, which changed the spiritual dynamic of the space.

Standing on the left and right sides of the gate are two of the four guardians of the world, known in Japan as the Four Heavenly Kings (Shitenno), who fight against evil and command the forces of the supernatural to defend the teachings of the Buddha. Each is charged with protecting a different corner of the globe. The two protectors at the Central Gate are the all-seeing Komokuten, who presides over the west, and Jikokuten, who watches over the eastern realm.