

Mt. Sumeru Rock Formation

Just below the Shitoan Hall is a group of rocks representing Mt. Sumeru (Jp. Shumisen), the sacred five-peaked mountain of ancient Indian mythology. In Buddhist cosmology, the mountain lies at the center of the universe and is tens of thousands of kilometers high and wide. Its four faces are made of gold, crystal, ruby, and lapis lazuli.

The representation of Mt. Sumeru at Saihoji is said to have the appearance of a turtle, an important Buddhist motif. It is also a reference to a proverb that claims when one prays for longevity or good fortune “cranes are 1,000 years and turtles 10,000 years.” The elevated part of what is taken to be the reptile’s shell is said to be a stupa, another reference to Buddhism.