

Yunotsu: Sainenji Temple

Sainenji's dramatic mountainside location suggests that this Buddhist temple must have taken enormous effort to build. Its once modest plot of land was originally occupied by a Zen sanctuary, which had fallen into disuse by 1561. This was the year that the Mohri family, who lorded over Iwami Ginzan and the surrounding area at the time, donated the land to a group of Jodo (Pure Land) Buddhists. Led by a monk named Nenkyu, these believers enlisted the help of Mohri clansmen, who went to work cutting into the rock, removing large chunks of the mountain until they had expanded the site sufficiently.

The project also included establishing a road from Yunotsu to nearby Okidomari, a port that the Mohri used mainly for silver shipments. This road passed right in front of Sainenji, which is also known to have functioned as a place of asylum for travelers in need of protection. The path remains walkable today, but has been moved slightly; you can find it behind the temple's closed side gate, which faces the main hall, rebuilt in 1879. The cemetery on the mountainside, behind the main hall, is far older: its earliest tombstones date back to the first half of the seventeenth century.