

Yunotsu: Sairakuji Temple and Ekoji Temple

These two Buddhist temples stand side by side at the foot of the steep cliffs that separate the town of Yunotsu from the forest. In fact, both Sairakuji and Ekoji were built partially on land obtained by removing bits of these rock walls; this task was undertaken to expand the cemeteries. Sairakuji, dedicated to the Buddha Amida Nyorai (Sanskrit: Amitabha), is the older temple. It was originally a Zen temple, but was converted to a Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land) sanctuary in 1521; its current buildings date to 1831. The term “sanctuary” here has both religious and literal meaning: Sairakuji was traditionally a so-called *muenjo* (“unaffiliated place”), meaning that the temple was exempt from certain laws and obligations, and provided asylum for believers in need of protection.

Ekoji is a Nichiren Buddhist temple and has an interesting cemetery. Its distinctive, wall-like structures with small tiled roofs house the graves of local people who worked in the shipping business on the busy route between Osaka and Hokkaido along the Sea of Japan coast beginning in the late seventeenth century. The tombstones on the far left, along the cliffside, are even older; some date back to the early Edo period (1603–1867).