Nitenmon Gate

Nitenmon was Kinpusenji Temple's main south gate until it burned down in 1341. The gate has not been rebuilt since then. Available historical records indicate that the gate had two stories, was roofed with tiles and painted red. It is associated with the heroic story of Murakami Yoshiteru, the loyal retainer of the fourteenth-century Prince Morinaga (1308–1335).

In Japan from the twelfth century, ruling power was in the hands of the warrior class, but in the early fourteenth century, Emperor Godaigo endeavored to return sovereign power to the court. To support this effort, Godaigo's son Prince Morinaga and his retainers disguised themselves as *yamabushi* (practitioners of Shugendo) and went to Yoshinoyama to confront the forces of the warrior regime.

It was not long, however, until the prince's troops were outnumbered by the warrior side and as defeat proved certain, Prince Morinaga resolved to commit suicide. Among his retainers, however, was the famously loyal Murakami Yoshiteru. Murakami climbed to the second floor of the Nitenmon Gate, disguised himself as the prince and performed ritual suicide there in front of the enemy. While the enemy was thus distracted, the prince and the rest of his retainers were able to escape, making their way toward Mt. Koya. Murakami's self-sacrificing, heroic deed remains admired and retold to this day, and he is honored with a stone column located beside the spot where the Nitenmon Gate once stood.