

Chumon Gate

This massive vermilion gate welcomes visitors and pilgrims into the Danjo Garan temple complex. Although the date of its original construction is uncertain, it is thought to be 819, when the Buddhist priest Kukai (known posthumously as Kobo Daishi; 774–835) founded Koyasan.

The current structure is much more recent, having been reconstructed in 2015 in honor of the 1,200-year anniversary of the founding of Koyasan. The previous gate burned down in 1843.

The gate is protected by the four Heavenly Kings of the Buddhist tradition, who are the guardian deities of the four cardinal directions.

The two statues on the outward side of the gate, which date back to the Edo period (1603–1868), survived the 1843 fire. The figure on the left is Jikokuten, the fierce guardian of the east, shown holding a golden sword and surrounded by a halo of fire to fight against evil. On the right is Tamonten, the guardian of the north and the protector of holy places, who is shown holding a golden treasure house.

On the inner side of the gate are two carved statues from 2015 (hence the much lighter color of the wood). The figure holding a scroll and ink brush is Komokuten, the guardian of the west, who encourages believers on the path to enlightenment. The other is spear-wielding Zochoten, guardian of the south, who acts as a catalyst for spiritual growth. Note the symbolic insects carved on the chests of these two guardians. The cicada's piercing cry is said to bring clarity and understanding to listeners, while the dragonfly, which is said to be only capable of flying straight ahead, is a symbol for moving toward one's ultimate goal without going off course.