

### **Jisonin Temple**

This temple was established in 816 by the priest Kukai (known posthumously as Kobo Daishi; 774–835), the founder of Koyasan. Originally, it acted as the “entrance” to the temple complex further up the mountain; it later became a place for pilgrims to stay overnight and take part in winter training exercises.

Until the nineteenth century, women were not allowed to enter Koyasan for fear they would distract the monks from their duties. Tamayori Gozen, Kukai’s mother, was no exception to this rule, so she settled at Jisonin Temple to spend her final years close to her son. After her death, Kukai had a vision that his mother had achieved Buddhahood. To honor her memory, he carved statues of both the Miroku Bosatsu (the Buddha of the Future) and his mother. He enshrined them within the Byodo Hall and assigned the temple its current name.

Jisonin is the starting point of the 24-kilometer Choishi Michi (Stone Marker Trail) that winds up through the forest to Koyasan. Kukai is believed to have made the long trip down to Jisonin Temple to visit his mother nine times every month.

Visitors will notice a large number of breast-shaped offerings and prayer plaques (*ema*) placed near the Byodo Hall. Jisonin Temple has welcomed female worshippers for over 1,000 years, and is one of the few temples in Japan that specialize in female-specific issues. Women come here to pray for safe pregnancies, to win their fights with cancer, and even to increase breast milk production.