

## Higashi Honganji Hakodate Betsuin Temple

Higashi Honganji Betsuin is a temple belonging to the Shinshu Otani branch of Japanese Buddhism, which is headed by Higashi Honganji Temple in Kyoto. The Main Hall was built in 1915, and is a reconstruction of an earlier structure that was destroyed by fire in 1907. The temple was the first in Japan to emulate traditional temple architecture using a reinforced concrete building structure.

Architect Ito Hirazaemon IX (1829–1913) designed the structure to be fire-resistant, and one of the first things that visitors see is the temple's sturdy iron gate, which serves as a fire door. Ito employed cutting-edge technology for the time, including American-made steel beams to support the weight of the temple's enormous tiled roof. While the exterior is reinforced concrete, the interior of the Main Hall is wooden, and the central area is richly decorated in black lacquer and gold leaf. The principal images of the temple are, on the left, a statue of the Buddhist monk Shinran (1173–1263), the founder of the Jodo Shinshu sect, and, on the right, a statue of Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light. Above the central area are carvings of *apsaras*, a type of celestial spirit in Buddhist cosmology.