

## Hasedera Temple

The origin of Hasedera Temple lies in the creation of a bronze plaque in 686 by a Buddhist priest named Domyo, who dedicated it to the ailing Emperor Tenmu (631–686) in the hopes of curing his illness. In 727, at the request of Emperor Shomu (701–756), the priest Tokudo erected the Eleven-Headed Kannon statue and enlarged the temple.

Though the temple has suffered several fires over the centuries, it has always been rebuilt and even expanded. Today, it contains several impressive architectural features, including the Niomon Gate, rebuilt in 1889 and housing two giant guardian statues; the Honbo, or head priest's office, built entirely of cypress in 1924 and listed as an Important Cultural Property; and the Five-Story Pagoda, completed in 1954.

Hasedera is the head temple of the Buzan branch of the Shingon sect of Buddhism. Part of the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage of 33 Buddhist temples of western Japan, Hasedera is dedicated to the worship of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion.

Known as the Temple of Flowers, Hasedera is surrounded by natural beauty. From mid-April to early May, some 7,000 Chinese peonies bloom along the Covered Stairway leading to the Main Hall. Other highlights include cherry blossoms in the spring and autumn foliage on Japanese maple trees in October and November. Hasedera's beauty has inspired countless Japanese artists and writers over the centuries. Beside the Covered Stairway is a plum tree that inspired this poem by Ki no Tsurayuki (872–945):

<i>hito wa isa</i>	As the human heart's so fickle
<i>kokoro mo shirazu</i>	your feelings may have changed
<i>furusato wa</i>	but at least in my old home
<i>hana zo mukashi no</i>	the plum blossoms bloom as always
<i>ka ni nioi keru</i>	with a fragrance of the past.