

The Great Buddha and Foreign Visitors

In the nineteenth century, as the major European trading nations expanded their activities in East Asia, increasing numbers of European visitors came to Japan. Many photographs of historical importance were taken during this period showing foreigners standing near the Great Buddha.

From the early seventeenth century through to the middle of the nineteenth century, the military government of Japan pursued a policy of isolation from the outside world. This policy limited opportunities for merchants and envoys to explore Japan and interrupted Western contact with the statue at Kamakura. With the reopening of the country, however, Western visitors began to return to Kamakura. Yokohama was made an open port in 1859. A foreign settlement was established in the city, and foreigners were permitted to move freely as far as 40 kilometers away. The nearby town of Kamakura became a favorite destination, and the frequent visits paid to the Great Buddha in particular are reflected in the many photographs and written accounts produced at the time.