

Rinsaiji Temple

Welcome to Rinsaiji Temple

The Buddhist monk Taicho Daishi (682–767) dreamed of climbing Mt. Hakusan in search of the Buddha and enlightenment for years. According to legend, one night a beautiful goddess appeared to him in a dream. “I am the embodiment of Mt. Hakusan,” she said. “If you want to find me, climb to the top of the mountain.”

Spurred on by this vision, he set off on a pilgrimage to the summit at age 36 with two of his disciples in tow. They successfully made it to the top, establishing the mountain as one of the three most sacred peaks in Japan, along with Mt. Fuji and Mt. Tateyama.

As a major pilgrimage site, Mt. Hakusan was at one time dotted with thousands of Buddhist statues. Most were simple stone Jizo guardians or protective bodhisattvas, often carved by the worshippers themselves. There were also masterpieces of carving and bronze work enshrined in the mountainside temples. For centuries people worshipped both the sacred mountain and the Buddhist statues, until the advent of the Meiji era (1868–1912), when the government announced a new policy called *shinbutsu bunri*, the forced separation of Buddhism and Shinto. Buddhism suddenly fell out of favor, leading to many Buddhist temples being closed or demolished and countless Buddhist statues and religious objects being destroyed.

Many of the small temples along the trails to Mt. Hakusan’s summit were destroyed, and most of the Jizo statues were removed. However, devout local residents who wanted to save the Buddhas and guardians, which had stood for centuries, carried them down the mountain and hid them away. Eight of these are now housed at Rinsaiji Temple.

Statue A is a bronze Jizo guardian that was once located next to Senjagaike Pond. According to legend, in Taicho Daishi’s time there were so many snakes on Mt. Hakusan that they disturbed the ascetic rituals of the monks climbing the mountain. Taicho Daishi gathered up a thousand snakes and carried them to a pond just below the summit that was always covered in snow. He cut a hole in the ice and cast the snakes in, and it became known as Senjagaike, the pond of a thousand snakes. The pond is also the source of the Tedorigawa River, one of four great rivers that are fed by the mountain.

Statue B is an elegant bronze figure of an Eleven-Headed Kannon, created in the eleventh century. Of the smaller heads, 10 represent the stages of enlightenment, while the slightly larger head toward the top represents the Amida Buddha, the source of Kannon herself. Originally located at Murodo, just below the Gozengamine peak, the statue was originally carved in wood, then cast in bronze. This statue is one of few remaining examples of this technique from the late Kamakura period (1185–1333) and has been designated an Important Cultural Property.

The Amida Nyorai Buddha figure (Statue C) was originally located on the 2,684-meter Onanjinmine peak. This elegant bronze statue has an inscription on the back dating it to March 1822.

When Taicho Daishi and his disciples first reached the summit in 717, they prayed to Buddha. Suddenly, a shining Eleven-Headed Kannon appeared over 2,702-meter Gozengamine, Mt. Hakusan’s highest peak. The three immediately carved a figure of the

bodhisattva to honor this miracle and set it on the peak. Statue D is a recreation of the original wood figure, which was worn away by the elements. Cast in bronze in 1824, the current statue stands 109 centimeters tall and weighs 207 kilograms, making it one of the largest statues in the world to be placed on a peak of this height. It was cast in sections to make it easier to carry up the mountain, which also helped when locals removed it to save the statue from destruction.

Statue E is of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, and was originally placed at the summit of Mt. Bessan. It was cast in bronze by Fujiwara Tomiomi, who also created the Amida Buddha figure. It was likely cast around 1822.

Statue F is a wooden figure of Yakushi, the Buddha of healing and medicine, dating to 1712. It was originally placed by the source of Ichinose Onsen's hot springs, at the bottom of Mt. Hakusan.

The wooden statue G is said to have been carved by Taicho Daishi (682–767), the priest who first climbed Hakusan in 717. It was originally placed at Hinoki no Shuku, at the entrance of an ancient climbing path. Today, only the upper half of the statue remains.

Today's mountain trails allow climbers to reach the summit of Mt. Hakusan in around five hours. However, when Taicho Daishi and his two disciples attempted to reach the summit, there were no such paths. Statue H is a wooden figure of Taicho Daishi at the time of his successful first pilgrimage to the peak. It was carved in 1611.

- A. Jizo Bodhisattva, bronze, 1183
- B. Eleven-Headed Kannon Bodhisattva, bronze, eleventh century
- C. Amida Nyorai Buddha, bronze, 1822
- D. Eleven-Headed Kannon Bodhisattva, bronze, 1824
- E. Kannon Bodhisattva, bronze, 1822
- F. Yakushi Nyorai Buddha, wood, 1712
- G. Shaka Nyorai Buddha, wood, eighth century
- H. Statue of Taicho, Daishi, wood, 1611