

## **Zentsuji Temple**

Zentsuji is a temple of the Shingon school of Buddhism. It traces its history back to the year 807, when Kukai (774–835), the founder of the Shingon school and the son of a local aristocrat, restored his family's ancestral temple and renamed it Zentsuji. An expansive complex, Zentsuji now consists of two adjacent sanctuaries: To-in or the Eastern Precinct, which Kukai founded, and Sai-in, the Western Precinct, which stands on the site of Kukai's birthplace and was a separate temple until the late nineteenth century.

The Kondo or Golden Hall at To-in is Zentsuji's main hall and houses a wooden statue of Yakushi (the Buddha of medicine and healing), the principal deity of the temple. Worship of the Yakushi Buddha has long been prevalent in Japan, both in Shikoku and elsewhere, because this Buddha is believed to help relieve suffering in this life rather than in the next. The current Golden Hall and its statue date back to the years 1699 and 1700 respectively; the originals were lost in a fire in 1558. Other noteworthy buildings at To-in include a five-story pagoda assembled story by story over a period of 60 years, and the temple's main South Gate, a monumental structure erected to commemorate Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. Nearby stand two majestic camphor trees, which are more than a thousand years old and are said to have towered over the temple grounds since the days of Kukai.

The grounds of Sai-in are somewhat less spacious than those of its neighbor but are revered by pilgrims who come to pay their respects at the Mieido Hall. Built on the site where Kukai was born, this ornate building enshrines the grand master of the Shingon school as a deity.