

### **Audio Guide: History of Unzen**

The history of Unzen begins in 701, when the itinerant Buddhist monk Gyōki built Manmyōji temple. In the centuries that followed, the temple had a strong influence on development in the Unzen area. In fact, most of the people who lived on the mountains were Buddhist monks until in the late 1500s when the temples and shrines on the mountain were destroyed by Christians.

Evidence of Buddhist influence can be found all over the mountain. For example, to your right is a small stream called Sanzu River, or the “River of Three Crossings.” This is a direct reference to the river in Buddhist traditions that the souls of the dead must cross in order to get to the afterlife. Since *jigoku*, a word for “hot spring,” is also the term used for the Buddhist hell, this stream’s name seems appropriate.

Nowadays, Unzen is famous as one of Japan’s first national parks, created to preserve the natural beauty and history of this region. Designated in 1934 in response to pressure from the foreign vacationers who came to love this area, Unzen-Amakusa National Park continues to preserve landscapes—like these *jigoku*—for future generations.

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