

Audio Guide: Unzen's Religious History

Now that we are leaving the *jigoku* hot springs area, let's return to the religious side of Unzen's history.

You may recall that Manmyōji was founded here in Unzen in 701 by the monk Gyōki. Gyōki was active before and during the Nara period (710–794) when the imperial capital was in Nara, a city south of Osaka and Kyoto. In the century and a half following its arrival in Japan, the study of Buddhism had already spread across the country, thanks in part to the evangelism of Gyōki, who is often credited with the construction of temples, statues, and other Buddhist monuments. Documents at the temple claim that Gyōki was instructed to build the temple on Unzen by the emperor himself! During its heyday, as many as 3,000 monks lived in Manmyōji, meditating and studying the sutras within its walls. Until the arrival of Christianity in the sixteenth century, Unzen was known as a major center of Buddhist spirituality.