

Audio Guide: The Golden Buddha and the Miniature 88-Temple Pilgrimage

Now head toward the temple's main hall. Inside is an imposing yet peaceful depiction of Shakyamuni, the historic Buddha and founder of Buddhism. This 5-meter-tall statue is just one of many *daibutsu*, or large statues of the Buddha, located across Japan.

This statue was built in Kyoto, then reassembled here in 1917 after the temple's original statue was destroyed in a fire. In fact, Manmyōji has been destroyed many times throughout Unzen's long history of religious unrest. The modern statue is made of wood and covered in no less than five layers of pure gold leaf. A single layer would soon oxidize from the sulfur in the air.

Go back outside and follow the path up into the nearby forest. Here you can spend some time walking a miniature version of the 88-Temple Pilgrimage. On the island of Shikoku, there are 88 temples associated with the famous monk Kūkai. Temple pilgrimages were a popular way to earn karmic merit and a good excuse to travel, but during the Edo period (1603–1867) travel was heavily controlled and limited by the shogunate. For those who could not make it to Shikoku (or were not able to spend two months walking around the island), symbolic pilgrimages like this one were established across Japan.