

Saigandenji Temple and Surroundings

The Furubochu area, located close to Mt. Nakadake and its active crater, was once an important center of religious activity. By the Muromachi period (1336–1573), some 88 religious retreats known as *bo* or *an*, where practitioners of Shugendo (mountain asceticism) came to train, had been established there. Over time, the buildings suffered repeated damage and fell into disrepair and disuse.

Kato Kiyomasa (1562–1611), the lord of Kumamoto, revived the Furubochu sites of worship in 1600. One of the most significant of these sites was Saigandenji Temple, thought to be one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Kyushu.

Every year on April 13, Saigandenji Temple hosts the Kannon Matsuri festival, during which Shugendo practitioners walk barefoot over a fire. The belief is that if the mind is calm and free of worldly thoughts, even fire will feel cool. The festival also includes a ritual in which participants sit in a large iron pot filled with water, which is heated up over a fire. This is said to bless them with good health throughout the following year.

The main hall, once located at the top of the temple's long, steep flight of stone steps, burned down in a case of suspected arson in 2001, but the inner hall (Oku-no-in), built in 1889, remains. Celebrated author Natsume Soseki (1867–1916) immortalized the temple grounds in his novel *Nihyaku Toka* (The 210th Day).