

Cryptomeria Avenue

More than 12,000 cryptomeria (Japanese cedar trees) line the three old highways that pilgrims used on their way to the shrines and temples of Nikkōzan. Two of these roads approach from the south, converging into a single avenue at Imaichi city. The third connects Nikkō to Aizu in Fukushima Prefecture to the northeast. The trees were planted by Matsudaira Masatsuna (1576–1648), a retainer who served the first three Tokugawa shoguns and oversaw construction in Nikkō under the third shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651). Starting in 1625, more than 50,000 trees were planted over two decades, although many have been lost to natural disasters and age. At a combined length of 35 kilometers, Cryptomeria Avenue is the world's longest tree-lined avenue.

Shinkyō Bridge (Important Cultural Property)

Shinkyō, which means “sacred bridge,” is the symbolic entrance to Nikkōzan. According to legend, when the monk and mountain ascetic Shōdō Shōnin (735–817) came in 766 to climb Mt. Nantai and practice religious austerities at the summit, he was unable to cross the raging Daiya River. Jinja-ō, guardian of the Wisdom Sutra and a manifestation of Kannon (Bodhisattva of Compassion) answered his prayers and appeared on the north side of the river holding two snakes. He created a bridge with the snakes, which Shōdō and his men used to cross the river.

The original bridge was built in 1636 and was only used during religious processions and by officials of the shogunate and court. The bridge was rebuilt in 1904, after it was washed away in the devastating Ashio Typhoon of 1902. It has been open to the public since 1973.