

Principal Deities of Rinnōji

The mountains of Nikkōzan are considered to be sacred. In particular, Mt. Tarō, Mt. Nyohō, and Mt. Nantai are said to be manifestations of the three main deities venerated at Rinnōji. Batō Kannon (Horse-Headed Bodhisattva of Compassion) is associated with Mt. Tarō, Amida Nyorai (Buddha of Infinite Light and Life) with Mt. Nyohō, and Senju Kannon (Thousand-Armed Bodhisattva of Compassion) with Mt. Nantai. Each deity is represented in the Sanbutsudō by a wooden statue that is approximately 7.5 meters tall and covered with gold leaf.

The Sanbutsudō's name, meaning "Hall of the Three Buddhas," is a reference to the three main deities of Rinnōji and to a second group of three Buddhist deities venerated at the temple: Shakyamuni (the historical Buddha), Yakushi Nyorai (Buddha of Healing), and Amida Nyorai (the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life). Shakyamuni is associated with the past, Yakushi Nyorai with the present, and Amida Nyorai with the future.

In the Tendai school of Buddhism, Batō Kannon is the protector of enlightenment, while Amida Nyorai is at the heart of religious practices based on the Lotus Sutra, an important Buddhist text. One of the principal practices is a 90-day period of walking meditation around an image of Amida Nyorai, which is performed at Rinnōji's Jōgyōdō hall. The thousand arms of Senju Kannon holds the many tools and implements to aid all sentient beings.