

Lake Chūzenji

Lava flowing out of Mt. Nantai 20,000 years ago blocked the Daiya River, creating Lake Chūzenji. Monk and mountain ascetic Shōdō Shōnin (735–817) and his party came upon the lake after a failed attempt to climb Mt. Nantai. It is named after Chūzenji Temple, which Shōdō built on the lake's northern shore in 784.

The small island of Kōzukeshima near the southern shore is one of three sites in the Nikkō area where some of Shōdō's remains are buried. The promontory that juts into the lake from the southern shore is another important historical and religious site: in a grove of trees near the tip is the Yakushidō Temple founded by Ennin (794–864), the monk sent to organize the temples and shrines at Nikkōzan into a unified entity that would spiritually protect Japan.

Kegon Falls

The Daiya River flows out of Lake Chūzenji to the east and plunges 97 meters into the Kegon Gorge. Kegon Falls is thought to have been discovered by Shōdō Shōnin during his exploration of the area. It is one of the five waterfalls in the gorge that are named for the five different periods of the historical Buddha's teachings. The Kegon period was when he presented his teachings in a rapid and condensed manner. Although this version of the teachings was too difficult for most people, comprehension was thought to lead to sudden enlightenment.