

## **Mitakidera Temple: Overview**

Tucked away in the mountains overlooking the city, Mitakidera Temple is one of Hiroshima's hidden gems. It is particularly popular with visitors in autumn, when its grounds are blanketed by red leaves, and in spring, during cherry blossom season. The secluded temple hosts hundreds of stone Buddha statues, some of which date to the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

The sculptures are scattered among an eclectic array of 10 wooden buildings. Look for the many boat-shaped Buddha statues, 88 of which are dedicated to temples in the Shikoku region. These are laid out to allow a mini pilgrimage starting from the temple entrance.

Mitakidera's main hall is dedicated to Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, who is believed to relieve suffering. The wooden hall, along with other parts of the temple, was significantly damaged in the atomic bombing. The hall's roof collapsed, but luckily the building did not catch fire, so the statues and sacred objects inside survived. The main hall was completely rebuilt in 1968.

Although the temple was officially founded in the ninth century, it traces its history back to the Nara period (710–794). Most of the temple buildings are considerably newer than that, dating from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but at the top of the winding path through the grounds is an ancient stone altar carved into the rock face. This early shrine was created to ask the mountain spirit's permission to build Mitakidera.

The temple is open from 8 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. daily, but closes at 5 p.m. in winter.