

Futabanosato Historical Walking Trail: Recommendations

Every site along the Futabanosato Walking Trail has its own story and purpose, and visiting each one is recommended if time permits. However, the roughly two-hour circuit route starting from Hiroshima Station includes several major shrines and temples that should not be missed.

Closest to the station, Hiroshima Toshogu Shrine is one of the many shrines in Japan dedicated to Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the influential shogun who made the city of Edo (now Tokyo) the seat of his power. Built in 1648, the shrine still has its original eye-catching red gate. Unlike the main hall and prayer hall, which burned in the atomic bombing and were later rebuilt, the gate was protected from the fire by its tiled roof. Look for the intricate bird carvings just under the eaves—these depict the ho-o, the mythical East Asian phoenix. Behind the main hall is the Kinko Inari Shrine, surrounded by holly and oak trees. Visitors like to pluck the large holly leaves, which were even used as postcards in the past. Beside the Inari Shrine is a flight of 500 stone steps covered by 100 red torii gates that leads to the Mt. Futaba Peace Pagoda. The 400-meter climb takes about 25 minutes.

Onaga Temmangu Shrine, a short walk from Hiroshima Toshogu Shrine, is believed to be one of the oldest sites on the mountain. According to legend, a small place of worship was first founded here in 901, and the oldest official records date the shrine to 1640. The current buildings are from the Meiji era (1868–1912) and all survived the bombing. The shrine is dedicated to Tenjin, the Shinto deity of learning and scholarship, and the large bull at the entrance to the shrine is his symbol.

Kokuzen-ji Temple is a Buddhist place of worship closely associated with Tokasan Enryuji Temple in central Hiroshima. Kokuzen-ji's main hall was built in 1671 as the family temple of the ruling Asano family, and is designated an Important Cultural Property. The building's roof was blown off by the atomic bombing, and glass from the windows is still embedded in the wooden pillars inside. However, the main structure survived, and the roof was carefully rebuilt using some of the remaining roof tiles. Finally, Shoko-ji Temple, with its striking gold statue of the Buddhist deity Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, is another recommended stop. The temple is deeply connected with the history of Hiroshima, and is believed to be the place where Mohri Terumoto (1553–1625) first decided to name the city. The temple also houses graves belonging to

two of the famous 47 ronin, samurai who avenged the death of their master, Asano Naganori (1667–1701).