

Terashita Kannon Temple

[Intro Version]

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[Full Version]

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A torii gate stands at the entrance to the extensive grounds, which also include Ushioyama Jinja Shrine. Until the Meiji era (1868–1912) it was common for Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines to share the same precinct. However, after the Meiji government enacted a law enforcing separation of the two traditions, the Kannon statue at Terashita was moved to a temple in the neighboring town of Hachinohe. Eventually it was returned, and now rests in the Kannondo, a hall dedicated to Kannon.

The 33 statues surrounding the Kannondo are representations of other temples in western Japan dedicated to Kannon. Pilgrims from Terashita Kannon would make the rounds of these temples and return with soil which they buried under the statue corresponding to each temple. This way, believers unable to make the long journey could at least visit the distant temples in spirit.

The stairs from the Kannondo lead up to a bell tower that houses a bell commissioned by the lord of Hachinohe in 1720. The bell was removed by the military during World War II, when metal collected from around the country was being smelted to manufacture weapons. Fortunately, the war ended just as the bell was on its way to be melted down, and it was safely returned to the temple. Local legend has it that those who place their heads inside the bell while it is being rung will gain wisdom. Though this may seem like a risky practice, the actual sound inside the bell is surprisingly subdued and pleasant.