

Ankokuden (Prayer Hall)

The Ankokuden prayer hall is closely connected with Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the first shogun of the Tokugawa period (1603–1867). The Kurohonzon, or “Black Buddha,” is enshrined here. This carved figure of Amida Buddha was gilded in gold leaf but has been blackened by centuries of incense smoke. It was deeply revered by Ieyasu, who believed it protected him and brought him success in his military campaigns to unify Japan. He carried the image with him at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, a massive battle which brought an end to over a century of civil war and was pivotal in the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603.

The Black Buddha is usually hidden from sight, but worshipers still come to pray for good luck and protection from disasters. The Buddha is displayed to the public only three times a year, on the fifteenth of January, May, and September.

To the left of the main altar is a painting of Ieyasu, with a number of ancestral tablets (*ihai*) of Tokugawa family members placed before it. The life-size bronze figure is of the imperial princess Kazu-no-miya (1846–1877). Towards the end of the Edo shogunate, the princess was betrothed to Iemochi (1846–1866), the fourteenth shogun, in an attempt to heal the deteriorating relationship with the imperial court. Reconciliation between the struggling parties proved impossible, despite the marriage, and support for the shogunate evaporated. After the untimely early death of her husband, the princess took vows as a nun, and is seen today as a tragic figure caught in the political intrigue of the time.