

## Chinese Juniper Trees

Between the Sanmon Gate and the Butsuden (Buddha Hall) stand seven giant Chinese juniper trees (*Juniperus chinensis*). The trees are more than 760 years old and are thought to have been planted by Kenchoji Temple's founding abbot, Lanxi Daolong (1213–1278).

Daolong was a Chinese Zen master who came to Japan in 1246 to teach Zen Buddhism. He spent his first years in Fukuoka and Kyoto before traveling to Kamakura, where he was invited to head a new Zen temple, Kenchoji, which was completed in 1253.

Legend has it that when Daolong left China, he brought Chinese juniper seeds with him. The trees are native to his hometown in Sichuan Province. Knowing he was unlikely to return to China, Daolong planted saplings from the seeds at Kenchoji as a reminder of his home.

The trees have flourished through the centuries, and are among the few things that remain from the time when the temple was built. They have survived many natural disasters, including the fires that destroyed much of the temple during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Chinese juniper trees have been listed for preservation by the city of Kamakura.

The largest of the seven trees is 13 meters tall and its trunk is roughly 6.5 meters in circumference. In part because of their presence at Kenchoji, Chinese juniper trees are a common sight at Buddhist temples and are considered a symbol of Zen temples in particular.