

## Kippōji Temple

Kippōji Temple is the site where Zen Master Dōgen (1200–1253), the founder of the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism in Japan, engaged in Zen practice after arriving in Echizen Province (now Fukui Prefecture) in 1243. The large stone on which he regularly sat in zazen is located close to the temple grounds and can still be visited today.

During the thirteenth century, the temple had only the barest facilities, and the closest cookstove was located in a villager's home at the foot of the mountain, almost 2 kilometers away. In order to prepare rice porridge for the monks living at the temple, twice a day, a monk named Tettsū (1219–1309) would travel all the way to the village and back. Wholeheartedly completing routine tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and bathing is a fundamental part of Sōtō Zen, so for Tettsū, the trek was just another element of daily practice. The villagers were amazed by his dedication, and they began to call the trail “Tettsū's Slope” (Tettsūzaka). Later in life, Tettsū served as the third abbot of Eihei-ji Temple. The steep, 900-meter path is now lined with 33 stone statues depicting different forms of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion.

In 1244, Zen Master Dōgen moved to the newly established Daibutsuji Temple, the precursor to Eihei-ji Temple. After his departure, Kippōji Temple was largely abandoned and slowly fell into disrepair. Centuries later, in 1892, a young monk who was training at Eihei-ji Temple named Tanaka Busshin (1867–1914) visited Kippōji and was shocked to find it abandoned. He reached out to monks at various institutions throughout Japan for support in restoring the temple. As a result of Busshin's efforts, the Hattō (Dharma Hall) was completed in 1903 to commemorate the 650th anniversary of Dōgen's death. The remaining restoration work was finished by 1907.

One distinctive feature of Kippōji Temple is that its Kaisandō (Founder's Hall) is open to the public. At most temples, only monks of a certain rank are permitted to enter the Kaisandō. Much like at Eihei-ji Temple, a large statue of Dōgen occupies the center of its altar. Such statues are typically hidden behind a curtain, but at Kippōji Temple the statue is fully exposed and visible.