

Okunoin

The large, moss-covered rock, with a *shimenawa* (sacred rope) wrapped around it, marks the place where the Dragon Goddess (Shichimen Daimyojin) of Mt. Shichimen is said to have appeared to Nichiro Shonin and his followers when they climbed Mt. Shichimen in 1297 and built a shrine to the deity that is the predecessor of Okunoin.

Origins

According to legend, Nichiren and his disciples met the Dragon Goddess of Mt. Shichimen for the first time in 1277. Following their encounter, Nichiren wished to one day climb Mt. Shichimen to enshrine the deity. Unfortunately, he died five years later in 1282 without fulfilling that wish. In 1297, Nichiren's successor, Nichiro Shonin, climbed Mt. Shichimen with a group of disciples, reaching the area where Okunoin Temple now stands. While resting, they claimed to have caught sight of the Dragon Goddess of Mt. Shichimen, who alighted on a large rock and then flew away. The shrine was built to mark the place where the Dragon Goddess appeared and a *shimenawa* (sacred rope) was wrapped around the rock as a symbol of its importance. Embodying antiquity and the presence of the dragon deity, the rock attracts many to Okunoin to offer prayers.

Path to and Lodging at Okunoin

The path from Keishinin Temple to Okunoin passes by Ninoike, the second of the Seven Great Ponds of Mt. Shichimen mythology. There are also many deer living on the mountain. Since it is forbidden to hunt deer on the sacred mountain, the deer tend to come much closer to people than in other natural settings. The Okunoin is located about 20 minutes on foot from Keishinin.

While Okunoin is a small temple, it houses numerous treasured Buddhist relics of interest to visitors. The temple provides lodging by advance reservation. Okunoin is small compared to Keishinin, however, and may not be able to accommodate large groups.