

The Temple Buildings

The buildings of Ryotanji are between 200 and 400 years old, and the main worship hall (*hondo*) was rebuilt in 1676. The hall features a nightingale floor, a security device which makes a sound like that of a nightingale singing when stepped on, thus warning of the presence of intruders. The floor has been attributed to Hidari Jingoro, a possibly fictitious Edo period (1603–1867) sculptor who is believed to have carved the famous “sleeping cat” of Toshogu Shrine in Nikko. The wooden dragon over the doorway in the main hall is also attributed to Jingoro.

The rear of the main worship hall looks out onto the pond garden. While attractive from any angle, the garden is best viewed from the seat of the guest of honor in the dining room to the east of the garden. Those privileged enough to be seated there could enjoy the garden views while also being closest to the door in order to escape should there be an attack on the temple.

Other buildings include a teahouse and the Ii family mausoleum, where ancestral tablets of previous Ii lords are enshrined, including that of Ii Tomoyasu (1010–1093), the founder of the family. Throughout the temple complex are other exquisite carvings, screens, and images of the Buddha that have been preserved for hundreds of years.