

Miidera Temple

Miidera Temple was historically one of four key Buddhist temples responsible for the spiritual protection of Kyoto, the capital of Japan until 1868. Miidera is the head temple of the Tendaijimon sect and is located at the foot of Mt. Nagara, which separates the city of Otsu from Kyoto.

The temple was founded in 672 as Onjoji Temple by Prince Otomo Yota, son of Emperor Kobun (648–672), to mourn his late father. It was renamed Miidera 200 years later by the abbot Enchin (814–891). Under Enchin's leadership Miidera came to be counted among the four great protector temples of Kyoto, along with Todaiji and Kofukuji temples in Nara and Enryakuji Temple at the top of Mt. Hiei.

Miidera has been destroyed several times throughout its history but has always been rebuilt. Its 300-acre grounds include 40 significant buildings. There are 10 designated National Treasures and 42 Important Cultural Properties on the grounds.

One of the Important Cultural Properties is the Daimon (Great Gate), built in 1452 and moved to Miidera when the temple was reconstructed in 1601. The imposing two-story wooden gate has a traditional vaulted roof of hinoki cypress bark and features two Nio guardian statues that date back to 1457.

The vast, wooden main hall (*kondo*) was built in 1599 and is designated a National Treasure. In front of the main hall is the bell tower, another Important Cultural Property, built in 1602. It has a sweeping gabled roof and latticework, making it more decorative than a typical bell tower. In it hangs Miidera's famous bell, which appears in one of the Eight Views of Omi, a traditional selection of scenic views of Omi Province (present-day Shiga Prefecture) that became popular themes of poetry and art.

Among the most distinctive buildings on the grounds is the Muromachi-period (1336–1573) scripture storehouse. The Zen-style building features a *rinzo*, an octagonal set of shelves designed to hold sutras that was invented in China. Despite its size, the *rinzo*, filled with a complete set of sutras, can be rotated by a single monk. Many of Miidera's other treasures are in the modern Cultural Property Storehouse, which displays sculptures dating back to the ninth century, scrolls signed by former shoguns, a series of 24 gold-foil-pressed sliding panels painted by Kano Mitsunobu (1565–1608), and more.

Miidera Temple is known for its scenic grounds with cherry blossoms in spring and for its sweeping views of central Otsu and Lake Biwa. The best vantage point is in front of the Kannondo Hall, which is on a plateau overlooking the lake. The hall is also one of the 33 stops on the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage in the Kansai area of western Japan.