

Enryakuji Temple

Enryakuji Temple was founded in 788 by the priest Saicho (767–822) and is the head institution of the Tendai school of Buddhism. Enryakuji is also known as the “mother mountain” of Japanese Buddhism and is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site that includes many temples in Kyoto, Otsu, and Uji.

Its grounds cover roughly 1,700 hectares of forest atop Mt. Hiei in Otsu. During its peak, Enryakuji had some 3,000 buildings. However, in 1571, the entire complex was burned down by the warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), whom the temple had opposed. Today, the Enryakuji grounds include 150 halls and other buildings. The grounds are divided into three main precincts: Todo, Saito, and Yokawa.

The Todo precinct includes the Konponchudo, Enryakuji’s main hall. The building is designated a National Treasure and houses the temple’s eternally burning flame, which was lit in 788 and has never been extinguished. The Saito precinct features the Ninaido, two conjoined halls where monks practice different forms of training.

In the Yokawa area is the Ganzan Daishido, a hall dedicated to Enryakuji’s former abbot Ryogen (912–985), who is also known as Ganzan Daishi. He is said to have originated *omikuji*, the fortune slips now popular at many shrines and temples in Japan.