

## **Shokokuji Temple**

### **[TEA & ART / HIGASHIJIN]**

The vast grounds of Shokokuji Temple include dozens of halls and other buildings, as well as the Jotenkaku art museum, a shrine, a pond, and twin gardens by the abbot's quarters that reflect the teachings of Rinzai Zen, the school of Buddhism with which the temple is affiliated.

Shokokuji was established in 1392 at the request of the third Muromachi shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408). The shogun regularly practiced zazen meditation and desired to advance the cause of Zen Buddhism by building a grand temple that would become a center of Zen culture. The temple was erected next to the shogun's palace.

The temple's halls have been destroyed by fire and war several times over the centuries. The oldest surviving structure on the grounds is the Hatto, or Dharma Hall, built in 1605 and now used as the main hall, the building that houses the image of the temple's principal deity. At Shokokuji that deity is Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha.

The painting of a dragon on the Hatto ceiling represents protection of the building and of Buddhism itself. The dragon's gaze is said to follow visitors wherever they go within the hall. The painting can be viewed during special visitation days in spring and autumn.