

## **Komyoji Temple**

According to legend, Komyoji Temple was commissioned in 599 by Prince Shotoku (574–622), a significant figure in the spread of Buddhism. The temple lies on the side of Mt. Kimino-o, where a total of 72 Buddhist temples once stood; clearings in the forest still seen today hint of their location. Most of Komyoji's original buildings were destroyed during periods of local conflict. However, the main hall, rebuilt in 1836, remains in good condition, and the 400-year-old temple bell sits inside the bell tower. The gate of the guardian kings and the statues inside are precious reminders of the temple's more distant past.

The gate is two-tiered with three bays, and temple visitors will pass through the central bay as they enter the temple grounds. The hip-and-gable roof is covered by 4,500 thick chestnut-wood shingles. Inscriptions revealed during 1950 renovations date the gate's construction to between 1242 and 1253. Two-tiered gates were uncommon at this time, a sign of the temple's high status, and the shingling is also unusual. The gate was designated a National Treasure in 1954.

The wooden guardian-king statues are painted in vermillion and displayed in the rear corners of the gate, with the open-mouthed guardian on the right and the closed-mouthed statue on the left. Although the sculptor and year of construction have not been verified, parallels have been drawn with the guardian-king statues of Sekiganji Temple in Hyogo Prefecture, which were carved by Higo Jokei in 1242.