

Kamiyodo Hakuho no Oka Exhibition Hall and Historic Sites

The Yodoe district boasts a fertile plain fronting the Japan Sea in the northernmost corner of the city of Yonago, backed by the foothills of Mt. Daisen. The area has been an important population center from prehistoric times. In 683, Kamiyodo Haiji Temple was built in a small valley that was already the site of a Shinto shrine and the tumulus graves (*kofun*) of important leaders dating from the fifth and sixth centuries. The temple burned down around the year 1000, however, and was never rebuilt. Foundation stones of the temple and many other artifacts were excavated between 1991 and 1993, and are now preserved at their original location, which was designated a National Historic Site in 1996. The Kamiyodo Hakuho no Oka Exhibition Hall was built nearby to house a full-scale replica of the devotional space of the temple's main hall, and to present the story of the temple and region through archaeological findings and historical records. It opened in 2011.

Fragments from a Devastating Fire

Kamiyodo Haiji Temple was built about a century after the first Buddhist temples were constructed in Japan, and was roughly contemporary with the temples of Horyuji and Yakushiji in Nara. Those architectural monuments, which were also built of wood, survive today, but Kamiyodo Haiji vanished in the devastating fire around the year 1000 and now exists only in memory.

Archaeological research shows that this compact temple complex used its valley site well. The overall layout was unusual, with three multistory pagodas (instead of the more typical one or two), arranged in a line running north to south. Only two, however, had been completed prior to the fire. A large main hall housed a devotional statue of the Amida Buddha seated on a pedestal, flanked by a pair of statues of protective bodhisattvas. Thousands of fragments of the statues were excavated and are on display. These fragments allowed experts to make full-scale reconstructions of the original statues, which are now the focus of the museum. Many charred fragments of painted plaster walls were also unearthed. These indicated that the walls of the Main Hall were covered with sophisticated murals similar to those found at Horyuji Temple. Parts of the murals have also been reproduced in their appropriate locations.