

Menuma Shodenzan Temple Overview

The grounds of Menuma Shodenzan Temple include a lavishly decorated main hall, and a stroll garden with Buddhist statuary and a pagoda. The main hall is often compared with Nikko Toshogu Shrine in Tochigi Prefecture for its elaborate carvings. The hall was built in 1760 and venerates Shoden (or Kangiten), the deity of joy, conjugal harmony, and longevity. The temple was founded in 1179 by Saito Sanemori (1111–1183), who was a famous samurai and military commander.

The Kisomon Gate is the main entrance to the temple. It is distinguished by a roof with three overlapping gables that protect the gate's decorative carvings from the elements. The main approach leads to the Shodendo, which is the main hall and the spiritual heart of the temple. The exterior of the Shodendo is adorned with colorful carvings depicting allegories, Buddhist teachings, and aspects of classical Chinese culture. The Shodendo is designated a National Treasure.

A statue of temple founder Saito Sanemori depicts him in his seventies holding a mirror and an ink brush, poised to color his gray hair black. He was determined not to be underestimated by younger warriors and is said to have dyed his hair black before fighting in the Battle of Shinohara (1183), where he met his demise.

The stroll garden behind the main temple buildings has a winding path that takes visitors past a stream and waterfall, as well as Buddhist statuary. The two-story Heiwa no To Peace Pagoda in the garden commemorates the people who lost their lives in World War II and was built to mark the ratification of the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951.