

## Konpon Chudo

A sacred flame has burned for centuries in the Konpon Chudo, Yamadera's main hall, gently illuminating its inner sanctum. The hall lies at the base of Mt. Hoju and is the first building visitors encounter on their way to the top of the temple complex. Yamadera is a branch temple of Enryakuji, the headquarters of Tendai Buddhism, which is located on Mt. Hiei, a sacred peak that straddles Kyoto and Shiga prefectures. The Konpon Chudo enshrines Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of Healing.

The Konpon Chudo is one of Yamadera's oldest buildings, and an Important Cultural Property. It was originally built after Yamadera's founding by the monk Ennin (794–864) in 860. The main structure was rebuilt in 1356 by Shiba Kaneyori (1329–1379), the first lord of Yamagata Castle, and may be the oldest beechwood structure in Japan. The single-story hall has a wide-sweeping hip-and-gable roof, a style known as *irimoya-zukuri*. This style originated in China and is often seen in Buddhist architecture.

Konpon Chudo's sacred inner sanctum is open to the public. A wooden statue of Yakushi Nyorai is kept in a *zushi* (double-doored shrine) in its center. Ennin may have carved the statue, which is only displayed for public viewing once every 50 years. Statues of the bodhisattvas of sunlight and moonlight flank the shrine, which is surrounded by statues of the 12 divine generals that guard Yakushi Nyorai.

The sacred flame known as the "Undying Light of Buddhism" burns before the shrine. Ennin carried this flame from Enryakuji to commemorate Yamadera's founding. Over the centuries, both Yamadera and Enryakuji's flames have gone out at different times. However, when one flame died, it was relit with the other. Through the shared legacy of the two temples, the same flame has burned for over 1,200 years.

A statue of Manju, the bodhisattva of wisdom, rests in the right corner of the inner sanctum. The statue once sat in its own hall, the Manjudo, but it was transferred to the Konpon Chudo following a fire. A statue of Bishamonten, a fierce god of war who is one of Buddhism's Four Heavenly Kings, stands in the left corner.