

Basho Haiku Monument

The traveling haiku poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) undertook a 156-day journey from Edo (present-day Tokyo) through Japan's northern Tohoku and Hokuriku regions in 1689. He traveled mostly on foot, accompanied by his disciple Kawai Sora (1649–1710). Together they followed in the footsteps of Saigyō (1118–1190), a poet Basho greatly admired, and visited many sites made famous by old poems. Their journey was the basis for *Oku no hosomichi* (Narrow Road to the Deep North), Basho's travel narrative of poetry and prose.

Basho and Sora visited Yamadera on July 13, though the mountainside temple was not one of their planned destinations. They went at the suggestion of residents of Obanazawa, a nearby town where they had lodged. Inspired by the beauty and tranquility of the temple complex, Basho composed his cicada haiku:

<i>shizukasa ya</i>	Such stillness—
<i>iwa ni shimiiru</i>	The cries of the cicadas
<i>semi no koe</i>	Sink into the rocks

(Translated by Donald Keene)

A stone monument inscribed with the haiku (*kuhi*), along with a statue of Basho and Sora, rests near Yamadera's entrance. There is another monument dedicated to Basho's cicada haiku, the Semizuka, on the path to the upper reaches of the temple grounds.

Oku no hosomichi was Basho's final work, and his most popular. The cicada haiku is one of his most celebrated poems, and is studied at schools around Japan. Displays relating to Basho's life and works can be seen at the Yamadera Basho Memorial Museum, which is a short walk from Yamadera Station.