

## Seasons of Yamadera - Summer

In summer the verdant woods along the stone path to Yamadera's inner sanctuary offer welcome shade from the season's intense heat. The mountainside echoes with the distinctive cries of cicadas, a sound famously captured in verse by the haiku poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) in his final work, the travelogue *Oku no hosomichi* (Narrow Road to the Deep North). Yamagata Prefecture is Japan's top producer of cherries, and visitors may encounter shopkeepers selling the seasonal fruit along the roadside on the way to Yamadera.

Yamadera's largest public summer event is the Banji Matsuri. This festival celebrates the legacy of the larger-than-life huntsman Banji Banzaburo (dates unknown), who donated the land on which Yamadera was built to its founder, the monk Ennin (794–864). According to legend, Banji gave up hunting in the region after meeting Ennin. The animals of the mountain gathered before them and danced in joy. The *shishi-odori* lion dance performed at the festival symbolizes this event.