

Ono Kannondo

This is the 10th location on the Aizu 33 Kannon Pilgrimage and is located near the entrance to the trail to the summit of Mt. Onodake. The *kannondo* hall was built in 1813, but the statue of the bodhisattva of compassion inside is considerably older. The statue originally stood at the summit of Mt. Onodake, but was later enshrined in its present location. Pilgrims offer prayers for the family, including for a happy marriage and safe childbirth. The building features exquisite carvings on the windows. There is a lively summer festival when the tranquil forest site, which is surrounded by flowering plants, becomes the setting for folk dancing and vendors set up small stalls selling snacks, drinks, and toys.

The Aizu 33 Kannon Pilgrimage

The town of Shimogo is part of the Aizu region in western Fukushima Prefecture, an area that was part of the Aizu domain under the Tokugawa shogunate during the Edo period (1603–1867). The Aizu 33 Kannon Pilgrimage includes 33 statues of Kannon. It is believed that the Kannon bodhisattva can change into 33 different forms and is the savior of all living things. There are a number of such pilgrimage routes to visit the 33 images of Kannon around Japan.

The 33 Kannon images along the route range from solitary stone sculptures standing in the countryside to statues housed in temples that are designated National Treasures. Kannon numbers 10 and 11 are located in Shimogo; both are in small, picturesque rural temples. Anyone is welcome to experience the peaceful atmosphere, just as visitors have been doing for centuries.

Center of Buddhist Culture

Aizu was an important center of Buddhist culture in this northern area from the Heian period (794–1185). Later, the daimyo lord Hoshina Masayuki (1611–1672) established the Aizu 33 Kannon Pilgrimage here. People undertook the journey to ask for forgiveness for past sins or to pray for good fortune and health, as well as to experience the varied culture and natural beauty of the region. This link between Buddhist culture and sightseeing became popular in Aizu, and people still undertake the pilgrimage for the same reasons today.