

## **Yamanaka Kannondo Hall**

Yamanaka Kannondo Hall at Sanage Shrine serves as a quiet reminder of how Shinto and Buddhism, now thought of as separate, were closely linked in Japan for more than a thousand years. The hall was built in the sixteenth century to house a statue of Senju Kannon, the thousand-armed bodhisattva of compassion, thought to have been carved in the late tenth century.

The hall was part of the Sanage shrine complex, which encompassed a vast number of different shrines, temples, and monasteries. The location chosen for the hall was a hillside some 300 meters northeast of the main shrine so that the deity could ward off evil spirits thought to come from that direction. The hall was associated with the shrine until the official separation of Shinto and Buddhism after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Following the government-ordered separation, many Buddhist structures and statues were destroyed. Yamanaka Kannondo is thought to have escaped this fate because the head priest of Sanage Shrine convinced the authorities that the hall was outside the shrine grounds and thus none of their concern.

Yamanaka Kannondo still houses the Senju Kannon statue, along with other Buddhist statues brought over from nearby halls that were torn down following the Shinto-Buddhist split. It is usually closed to the public.