

## **Ganjoji Temple**

The Sagara family governed the Hitoyoshi Kuma region for nearly 700 years, promoting peace and prosperity and successfully navigating the ups and downs of history. Their legacy is preserved at Ganjoji, the Sagara family temple.

The temple was built in 1233 by Sagara Nagayori (1177–1254), founder of the Sagara family. Nagayori had the temple built to the northeast of Hitoyoshi Castle. Temples were often built to the northeast of palaces and castles to protect against ill fortune, since evil was believed to flow from this direction.

Thirty-seven generations of the Sagara family governed the region, and most are buried in the cemetery behind Ganjoji's Main Hall. Paths through the expansive, leafy burial grounds meander past graves marked by stone stupas and miniature pagodas, whose designs differ according to the era.

The Kiyomizu Kannon Hall on the grounds of the temple is the first worship site on the Sagara 33 Kannon Pilgrimage, which was popularized in the Edo period (1603–1867). The pilgrimage includes 35 worship sites dedicated to Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. The image of Kannon enshrined in the Kiyomizu Kannon Hall dates from the early seventeenth century and is displayed twice a year during the pilgrimage periods. The statue depicts the deity standing on a lotus flower and wearing an ornate headdress.

Ganjoji houses several other important works, including a Heian-period (794–1185) wooden image of Fudo Myoo (one of Buddhism's Wisdom Kings), a depiction of Amitabha Buddha from the early Kamakura period (1185–1333), and a Mandala of the Two Realms from the fourteenth century. These are generally displayed only on special occasions.