

Eikokuji Temple

Eikokuji is known for tales of ghosts, a picturesque pond, and the events of the famous Satsuma rebellion. The temple belongs to the Soto school of Zen Buddhism and was founded in 1408.

Among Eikokuji treasures is a hanging scroll depicting a ghost-like female figure, with contorted hands and flowing robes, floating against a backdrop of reeds. The spirit is said to have appeared at the temple pond behind the Main Hall to ask for help from the temple's first priest. According to legend, she had been the mistress of a powerful local man and, driven to despair by the man's wife, had drowned herself in a river. Unable to pass into the next life, she had been trapped as a vengeful ghost. The priest is said to have painted the scroll to show the once beautiful woman her new form and to help the ghost on her way. The scroll displayed in the Main Hall is a copy.

The temple pond can be reached through the Main Hall, and visitors are welcome to sit and enjoy the view from the Audience Hall. Flowering plants, such as wisteria and hydrangea, as well as trees like cherry, pine, and maple, reflect the varied colors of the changing seasons in the waters of the pond.

Artifacts from the Satsuma Rebellion are displayed in the Main Hall. These include an artillery shell and a hanging scroll with calligraphy by the famous samurai Saigo Takamori (1828–1877). In 1877, nine years after a new government was established under Emperor Meiji (r. 1868–1912), Saigo led disaffected samurai in a rebellion against the imperial government. The rebels battled the imperial army across Kyushu, and after failing to take control of the castle in Kumamoto to the north, Saigo retreated to Hitoyoshi Kuma. His army made its headquarters at Eikokuji, staying for 33 days before being driven out by pursuing government forces.