

Sagara 33 Kannon Pilgrimage

The Sagara 33 Kannon Pilgrimage includes 35 worship sites dedicated to Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, in the Hitoyoshi Kuma region. The statues are all carved from wood, and some are gilded. They depict Kannon in a wide variety of artistic styles, sometimes seated or standing, with hands clasped in prayer or held in other symbolic poses. The oldest figures date from the Nara period (710–794).

Some of the Kannon images are displayed all year round, but the majority can only be viewed for a few days surrounding the spring and autumn equinoxes. One of the sites in Hitoyoshi to offer year-round viewing is the Murayama Kannon Hall at Kanrenji Temple, the ninth site on the pilgrimage. That Thousand-Armed Kannon is depicted standing on a lotus flower with arms extending forward, as well as reaching out from the body in a radial pattern. The many arms represent Kannon's all-encompassing compassion. The figure dates from the twelfth century and has soft flowing lines characteristic of the era.

The pilgrimage was popularized in the Edo period (1603–1867) and continues today. It is held on the day of the spring equinox and for seven days over the autumn equinox. During the pilgrimage periods, members of the community share food and drinks with their neighbors and with visiting pilgrims.