**Jinguji: A Temple in the Snow**

Jinguji, a historic Zen temple about 3 kilometers north of Tokamachi, is thought to have been founded in 807. Standing in a tranquil cedar forest, the temple and its formidable Sanmon Gate are unusual among Buddhist temple structures for being roofed with thatch.

Over the centuries, Jinguji abbots have risen with the sun to ready the path to the temple’s central Kannondo hall. They sweep debris from the mossy stones in summer and tamp down a path through the snow in winter so worshippers can reach the hall and pray to Kannon, the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion. The temple’s statue of Kannon—a version of the deity called “Thousand-Armed Kannon”—is a Designated Cultural Property of Niigata and is only on display for three days each July.

The 15-meter-high Sanmon Gate and the Kannondo hall date to the 1760s and 1780s, respectively. They were built by master carpenters from Izumozaki, a coastal town to the north. The Kannondo hall has a hip-and-gable roof with a large gabled dormer above the main entrance. The roof is also unusually steep; its shape is not only elegant but also helps to keep snow from accumulating and crushing the roof with its weight.

The longevity of the temple’s structures demonstrates the devotion and care of the community. Snow-damaged sections of thatch are replaced each year, and visitors in the autumn months will see bundles of thatch hanging to dry in preparation for the springtime repairs.