**Kokokuji Temple**

Kokokuji Temple played an important role in the history of Zen Buddhism in Japan and was once one of the largest Zen complexes in the western part of the country. The temple was founded in 1227 to pray for the repose of the spirit of Minamoto no Sanetomo (1192–1219), the third shogun of the Kamakura shogunate (1185–1333). The scale of the complex has diminished over the centuries, but its grounds remain extensive and are beautiful throughout the year.

Kokokuji was founded as Saihoji Temple and initially belonged to the esoteric Shingon school of Buddhism. In 1258, Zen master Shinchi Kakushin (1207–1298) became head monk, changed the temple’s affiliation to the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, and renamed it Kokokuji. The transformation occurred amidst a transitional period in Japanese history, marked by the transfer of political authority from the emperor in Kyoto to a new ruling class of samurai warriors based in Kamakura. This era was also one of rapid diversification of Japanese Buddhism. Zen was relatively new to Japan and it flourished under the Kamakura shogunate. Kakushin played a key role in spreading the faith beyond the capital and developed Kokokuji into one of the country’s leading Zen temples.

Today, the complex comprises several halls, primarily the Main Hall (Hatto), Meditation Hall (Zazendo), and the Founder’s Hall (Kaizando). The Founder’s Hall is dedicated to Shinchi Kakushin, who was posthumously granted the title Hotto Enmyo Kokushi (lit. “perfectly awakened national teacher of the Dharma lamp”) by Emperor Godaigo (r. 1318–1339). The hall is built over his burial site and contains a wooden image of the revered monk.