

Komyoji Temple

Komyoji is the head temple of the Seizan Jodo school of Buddhism. The vast temple complex at the base of the Nishiyama mountains has a strong historical connection with Honen (1133–1212), the founder of the Jodo (Pure Land) school. Komyoji is also a popular place to view maple foliage. Highlights include the stone stairway leading to the Miedo Hall and the 200-meter “maple path” to the left from the main gate. The tunnel of leaves formed by some 250 trees is bright green from spring through summer and turns fiery red and orange in autumn.

Brief History

The origin of Komyoji dates to 1198, when the monk Rensei (Kumagai Naozane, 1141–1208), a disciple of Honen, built Nenbutsu Zanmaiin Temple. Honen’s teachings centered on practicing *nenbutsu*, the ritual recitation of the name of Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. According to temple legend, in 1228, on the 17th anniversary of Honen’s death, his stone coffin emitted rays of light that shone toward Nenbutsu Zanmaiin. Honen’s remains were brought to the temple, cremated, and enshrined on the grounds. Shortly after, the temple name was changed to Komyoji, which is written with kanji characters for “radiant light,” a phrase that carries spiritual connotations in Buddhism.

Miedo, Amidado, and Shakado Halls

The Miedo Hall was built in 1754 and is the main hall of Komyoji. The principal object of worship is a papier-mâché figure of Honen. It is believed that he made it himself using letters from his mother. At the top of a steep stairway behind the Miedo is the mausoleum enshrining Honen’s bones (closed to the public). His stone coffin and cremation site are located near the Amidado Hall and the Shakado Hall, respectively.

The Amidado enshrines a 2-meter statue of Amida Buddha flanked by smaller sculptures of Seishi, the bodhisattva of wisdom, and Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. Amida’s hands form a mudra welcoming the souls of the devotees to the Pure Land. The hall dates to 1799 and is said to reflect the traditional Jodo style characteristic of the Heian period (794–1185).

The Shakado was constructed in 1736 and enshrines a statue of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. In front of the hall is a dry landscape garden with several carefully placed rocks. The three largest stones represent Amida Buddha, Seishi Bodhisattva, and Kannon

Bodhisattva, while the other 18 symbolize Amida's 18th vow (out of 48), which is considered to be the cornerstone of Jodo school teachings. It is an oath that all sentient beings who sincerely call upon the name of Amida will be reborn in a paradise-like realm known as the Pure Land. On the opposite side of the garden is the Chokushimon Gate, which was solely used by messengers from the emperor's court.