

## **Kongojoji Temple**

A stone gate inscribed with Sanskrit characters leads to the tranquil grounds of Kongojoji. The temple dates from the ninth century and is said to be the oldest in Yamaga. It was established by Kukai (774–835), the founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism in Japan.

Kongojoji Temple is revered for a particular episode from its long and storied past. According to local lore, the hot springs of Yamaga dried up for a period of many months in the fifteenth century. Yumei Hoin, the temple's head priest at the time, prayed continuously for the restoration of the waters and built the town's Yakushi-do Hall during this time to honor Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of Healing.

It is said that the waters finally flowed again due to Yumei Hoin's diligent prayers. This event is celebrated in the Onsen Fukkatsu Festival every December. Kongojoji is also a venue for the Yamaga Lantern Romance events in February, during which colorful umbrellas and bamboo vessels are illuminated to create an ethereal atmosphere around town.

The term *kongo* refers to the vajra, a legendary Buddhist ritual implement that embodies the physical properties of a diamond and a thunderbolt and, by association, connotes a person's spiritual strength and wisdom. The name of Kongojoji Temple in this context suggests attaining enlightenment through Buddhist devotion.