Gyokushoji Temple

Gyokushoji Temple in northern Kikuchi is associated with a period of cultural blossoming that began under the rule of Kikuchi Tamekuni (1430–1488), the Kikuchi clan leader who founded the Soto Zen temple in 1452. With his clan's political and martial strength in decline, Tamekuni turned to supporting local culture and providing education for samurai and townspeople, encouraging their intellectual and spiritual pursuits. Under the leadership of Tamekuni and his son Shigetomo (1449–1493), Kikuchi became a regional hub for Buddhist and Confucian scholarship, where poetry and tea culture also flourished.

Gyokushoji was built by Tamekuni to house his tomb, which is in the temple cemetery next to Shigetomo's grave. The temple's halls and other structures have been lost to fire and rebuilt several times, but a bronze temple bell that now hangs in the current main hall has survived through the centuries. Cast in 1496, it is presently used as a *densho*, a bell rung to announce worship services and during prayer. In the main hall, along the walls around the central altar sit 16 statues of *rakan* (arhats), or Buddhist devotees who have attained spiritual enlightenment. The temple's principal deity is the bodhisattva Daiseishi, who represents wisdom.