

Shotokuji Temple

This temple of the True Pure Land school of Buddhism overlooks the Sea of Japan from a hilltop in Teradomari. Shotokuji's sacred treasures have survived multiple fires and tumultuous centuries, and its rich, well-recorded history provides insight into how temples came to be founded in this coastal village area. Visitors exploring the temple grounds are free to open the doors and enter the main hall to pray or observe.

History

Shotokuji was founded in 1593 by Gannen, who was originally the chief priest of Guzeiji Temple in Noto, Ishikawa Prefecture. Gannen was a disciple of Kyonyo, chief priest of Higashi Honganji Temple in Kyoto. As an affiliate of Honganji, the headquarters of the True Pure Land school, he participated in the Ishiyama Honganji War (1570–1580), a conflict between the powerful warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) and an uprising of Buddhist priests and peasants based at Ishiyama Honganji Temple in

Osaka who opposed samurai rule. After distinguishing himself in the conflict, Gannen was instructed by Kyonyo to leave Guzeiji and spread True Pure Land Buddhism in the northeast part of the country. Leaving Guzeiji to his younger brother, Gannen and 30 followers set out with two sacred treasures to serve as objects of veneration at a new temple.

Teradomari was originally only a temporary stop on their way, but villagers pleaded with the priest to remain after he preached for three days at the home of his host. To meet their needs, Gannen decided to stay, and he founded Shotokuji Temple.

After the original temple was lost to fire in the middle of the Edo period (1603–1867), it was rebuilt in its current location. Ryokan (1758–1831), a priest known for his nomadic lifestyle and artistic accomplishments, is said to have maintained a friendship with the ninth chief priest of Shotokuji, Enga, and some examples of poetry they exchanged remain. The temple burned down once more during the Boshin War (1868–1869), but the two sacred treasures were saved from the flames both times and are enshrined in the temple to this day.

Main Hall: A Golden Sanctuary

The inside of the large main hall is decorated to evoke the Buddhist Pure Land, with gold-leaf foil on the sanctuary walls, lavish altars, and detailed peonies carved on the golden transoms. A large figure of a white elephant stands to the right of the sanctuary entrance when not being pulled through the streets by children in a festival celebrating the Buddha's birth. The figure represents the white elephant that is said to have appeared to the Buddha's mother in a dream, symbolizing his conception.

The principal image at Shotokuji is a statue of Amida Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. Notable treasures from Shotokuji's founding include a seated wooden statue of Shinran (1173–1263), the founder of True Pure Land Buddhism, and a painting of Prince Shotoku (574–622). Prince Shotoku is credited with reforming administrative governance and promoting Buddhism when it first came to Japan. He is venerated as a protector of the nation, the imperial family, and Buddhism itself. The main hall enshrines several other sacred objects, such as a wooden statue of Prince Shotoku and a scroll painting of the Seven Patriarchs of True Pure Land Buddhism.

Temple Garden

The garden at Shotokuji is thought to have been constructed in the mid-Edo period by skilled gardeners from Kyoto using Yamato stone (from what is now Nara Prefecture) brought to Teradomari on a ship from Osaka. The garden is designed around a small pond filled with decorative carp and water lilies. An artificial hill on one side is covered with azalea bushes that bloom pink and white in the spring. Visitors can view the garden from inside the temple drawing rooms or enter on foot through the small bamboo gate behind the main hall.