

## **Yosenji Temple**

Yosenji is a small temple on the northern side of Teradomari that belongs to the True Pure Land school of Japanese Buddhism. Its striking main hall features paintings and golden décor that evoke the paradise of the Buddhist Pure Land, and its moss-filled inner garden reflects the beauty of the changing seasons. Visitors to the temple grounds are free to enter the main hall, but a phone reservation is needed to see the garden or guest hall.

### *History*

Yosenji was founded in 1594 by the Buddhist priest Jomyo, who hailed from Shinano Province (present-day Nagano Prefecture). Before he became a priest, Jomyo was a warrior named Kanai Tonojo Nakahara Yasunori serving under the powerful warlord Takeda Shingen (1521–1573). Though he distinguished himself as a fighter, he was deeply affected by his master's passing in 1573. Awakened to the impermanence of the world, he put his sword aside and resolved to pray for the souls of those who had died

on the battlefield. He took the name Jomyo and became a priest at a temple called Jokoji, which had been damaged by the fires of a battle he had fought in years before.

After two decades of spiritual training, Jomyo was instructed by the head priest to leave Jokoji for Yahiko, an area with many True Pure Land believers in need of a religious leader. On his travels, Jomyo passed through Teradomari, and he eventually decided to build Yosenji there.

*Main Hall: A Vision of the Pure Land*

The current main hall was reconstructed in 1999. It enshrines the temple's principal image, a statue of Amida Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Life and Light. The statue's exact age is unknown, but it is thought to be approximately 300 years old. Though most Buddhist statues stand straight, this image leans forward at a noticeable angle. The angle is said to reflect Amida Buddha stepping forward to save those who come before him. The statue is flanked by altars that frame scroll paintings depicting Shinran (1173–1263), the founder of the True Pure Land school, and Rennyō

(1415–1499), a descendant of Shinran credited with expanding the school's reach and influence. On the wall in the chamber to the left are painted scrolls depicting Shotoku Taishi (574–622), the prince credited with spreading Buddhism in Japan, and the Seven Patriarchs of True Pure Land Buddhism.

The main hall evokes the image of the Buddhist Pure Land, the paradise where, according to True Pure Land teachings, those who believe in Amida Buddha and invoke his name will be reborn after death. The wall panels of the inner sanctuary are painted with lotus flowers, which are symbols of salvation in True Pure Land Buddhism, and the golden transoms are carved in the shape of heavenly maidens playing musical instruments among the clouds.

### *Garden and Guest Hall*

Between the main hall and the guest hall is a pond garden shaded by maple trees. Various lanterns are placed throughout, and stone mortars that were once used in Sado Island gold mines are set into the mossy ground. The

garden is a popular place for viewing autumn foliage, as the changing colors of the maple leaves contrast with the mossy green of the garden floor. It can be viewed from inside the administrative building (*kuri*) or from above when standing in the guest hall.

The guest hall at Yosenji is a two-story building. The second floor is a parlor room that was once part of the Oshikiya Gohei *ryokan*, a prestigious Teradomari inn dating back to the Edo period (1603–1867). When the inn went out of business in 1932, the head priest purchased part of the building and had it moved to Yosenji. The interior has both Japanese- and Western-style rooms, and early twentieth-century design elements can be seen in the wooden wall clock, shelves for tea utensils, a round window, antique sitting-room chairs, and glass windows frosted on the lower half to shield guests from the gaze of people on the streets below.

### *Temple Grounds*

There are two small halls to the left side of the path that leads through the temple's wooden gate toward the main hall. The sutra storage hall contains

records with information about parishioners spanning more than three centuries, and the Taishi Hall houses a statue of Prince Shotoku that is

moved to the main hall once a year in August for a prayer service. Between the halls stands a large statue of Shinran, the founder of True Pure Land Buddhism.