

History of Koyasan

In the year 804, Kobo Daishi (Kukai) traversed the seas to China's Tang Dynasty in order to study Buddhism. After studying there for 2 years he returned to Japan to propagate his newfound Shingon esoteric Buddhism. In order to secure a place where monks could train, he found what is now known as Koyasan sitting atop a 900 meter-high plateau, which with land granted to him from Emperor Saga, established what is now known as Koyasan's Kongobu-ji head temple in 816. Koyasan became the central hub for its teachings of Shingon Buddhism and now remains as one of Japan's most sacred historical sites. In 2004 UNESCO designated Koyasan a World Heritage Site: "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range". There are currently 117 temples dedicated to the teachings of Shingon Buddhism.



Dai-mon Gate

Serving as Koyasan's main entrance, the Great Gate is a spectacle of design standing nearly 25m tall. It was rebuilt in 1705 after being destroyed in a fire and was later given an overhaul for the 1150th anniversary of Kobo Daishi's passing. Two menacing guardian deities carved during the Edo period flank the entry way. The Daimon Gate is the first structure visitors coming up the Choishi-michi pilgrimage route see when arriving in Koyasan, and the views and stunning sunsets that surround the mountain are spectacular year-round.

Danjo Garan Sacred Temple Complex

One of two sacred areas in Koyasan, the Danjo Garan Sacred Temple Complex was founded by Kobo Daishi (Kukai) when he returned to Japan from China as a place where Buddhist monks could peacefully study his newly found Shingon Esoteric sect of Buddhism. Most of the buildings in the complex are reconstructions due to the loss of originals in fires. The construction of the Danjo Garan was a feat only accomplished through the sacrifice and perseverance of many generations.



Konpon Daito Great Pagoda

Known as the Great Stupa, the Konpon Daito Great Pagoda is a brilliant structure painted in a vibrant vermilion lacquer that towers nearly 48m tall. The construction of the Konpon Daito proved to be a great undertaking as it took over two generations to complete with the present structure being rebuilt in 1937. The statues housed in the Daito accompanied by the surrounding pillars create a magnificent 3-dimensional mandala with the Cosmic Buddha in the center.



Mie-do Hall

Originally used by Kobo Daishi as a training hall, the Mie-do now exists as a building that enshrines an image of Kukai. The present structure was reconstructed in 1847 and is the only building in the Danjo Garan Complex which contains a state-of-the-art fire safety mechanism. The Mie-do holds a very special place in the hearts of those who believe in Kukai.



Kon-do Hall

The Kon-do Hall was the first structure in the Danjo Garan to be constructed and was the main hall used for lectures and ceremonies. Kobo Daishi began construction on the Kon-do in 819 but passed away in 835 before it could be completed. The Kon-do has been destroyed by fires seven times in its history, with the current structure being completed in 1932.



Kongobu-ji Head Temple

Koyasan's head temple, Kongobu-ji also refers to the entirety of the Koyasan area. Originally built in honor of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's mother, what used to be called Seiganji Temple was eventually renamed Kongobu-ji in 1869. It is the main temple for around 4000 branch temples of the Shingon esoteric sect of Buddhism. Kongobu-ji Head Temple beautifully combines form and function into its design and features Japan's largest rock garden; The Banryutei.



Nyonin-do Hall

Nyonin-do Hall, also known as the Women's Hall, is the last of 7 halls that used to exist on the perimeter of Koyasan. Since Koyasan was originally a place for Buddhist monks to peacefully train, women were prohibited from entering the temple grounds. Women would walk along the trail surrounding Koyasan to each of these halls in order to pray for their loved ones as well as facilitate their own training. This trail, now known as the Nyonin-michi or Women's pilgrimage route, is popular among tourists as a hiking trail with beautiful views overlooking the surrounding mountains.



Edo Period Nyonin-do Hall Guidebook Illustration

Tokugawa Mausoleum

Built in 1643 by the third Tokugawa shogun Iemitsu, the Tokugawa Mausoleum enshrines the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, Ieyasu and his son Hidetada. Dedicated as an Important Cultural Property in 1961 this building is an important part of Japan's history that took two decades to complete.



Reihokan Museum

Established in 1921, the Reihokan Museum houses some of Japan's most important cultural assets and national treasures. Ranging from statues, mandalas, paintings and relics, tens of thousands of items are currently being preserved on the museum grounds offering a unique glance into the world of Buddhist culture.



Okuno-in

Koyasan's most sacred site, Okuno-in cemetery, is the largest cemetery in Japan stretching 2km long with over 200,000 tombstones. Lined with ancient cedar trees, some hundreds of years old, Okuno-in is the location of Kobo Daishi Kukai's Mausoleum, where it is said he still remains today in eternal prayer. Large Jizo guardian deities line up at the foot of the Gobyonohashi Bridge where visitors pour water over them to pay respects for their ancestors. From members of imperial families to commoners, samurai to scholars, Okuno-in is a place where status knows no bounds and is truly the embodiment of the idea that once we pass on to the next life, we are all equal.

Shoujingu Morning Ceremony

Every day at 6:00am and 10:30am, Buddhist monks carry food up to the Toro-do Hall as part of a ritualistic offering to Kobo Daishi (Kukai). With its thousand-year history, this ceremony can be viewed every day without fail whether during rain, or snow.

Gobyonohashi Bridge

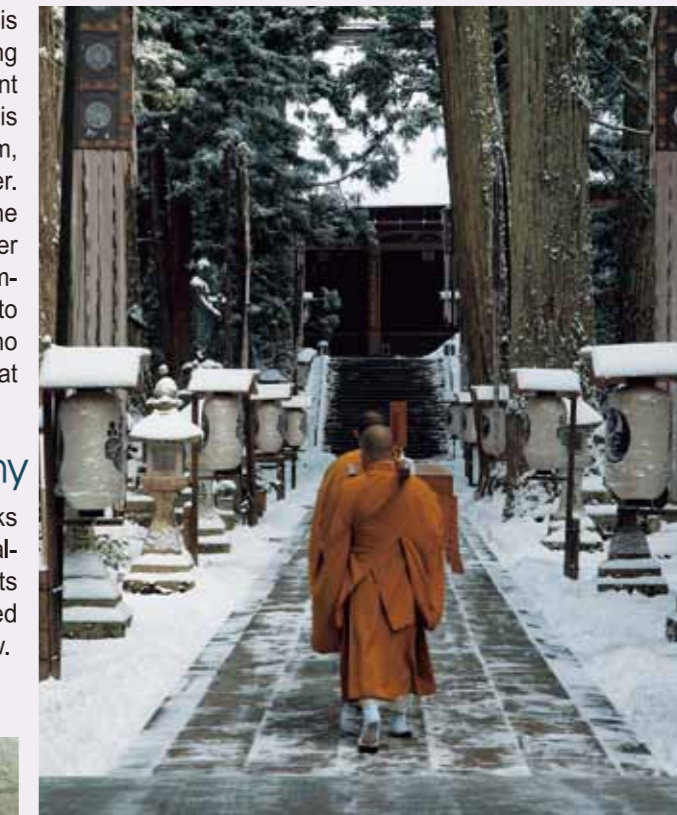


Gobyonohashi Bridge is the third and final bridge before reaching the sacred area of Kobo Daishi's Mausoleum. The 36 stone slabs used to build the bridge represent the Buddhas of the Diamond Realm. Their names are engraved on the bottom of the stones in Sanskrit and can be seen reflected in the river below.

Gorinto Monument

These granite statues, some small and some massive, can be found all along the stone path to Okuno-in. A five-tiered stupa, Buddhism teaches that the Earth is made from five different elements. Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and Space are depicted on each of the five tiers with carvings of their corresponding Sanskrit letters.

𑖀 Space
𑖄 Wind
𑖅 Fire
𑖆 Water
𑖇 Earth



Toro-do Hall

Standing in front of Kobo Daishi's Mausoleum, the Toro-do Hall was built as a place of worship. Thousands of lanterns dedicated by worshipers decorate this hall. Buddhist Monks spend their days tending to an everlasting flame; evidence that Kobo Daishi is still alive. Hidden in the hall's basement are 50,000 statues donated for the 1150th anniversary of Kukai's entrance into eternal meditation in 1984.

Experience Koyasan

Ajikan Meditation

Ajikan is a kind of meditation unique to Shingon Buddhism and is offered by many temples to their guests. Even beginners and people with no meditation background can take the challenge to calm their minds and open the gateways to higher consciousness.



Sutra Copying

Using India ink and a traditional Japanese calligraphy brush, "Shakyo" is the art of copying one kanji character at a time gracefully and with gentle precision. Idle thoughts fade in this calming experience of copying the Heart Sutra.



Jukai Ceremony

The Jukai ceremony offers everyone a unique opportunity to be with a Buddhist master and experience firsthand a formal and ancient Buddhist rite. Anyone can participate in this simple yet enchanting ceremony which has a history of 2,500 years.