

Important Cultural Property

9 Kitchen and Dining Hall (Daidokoro)

The Kitchen and Dining Hall is a nearly 500-square-meter hall housing the kitchen where the priests prepared meals and the dining hall where they would eat with visiting pilgrims. The hall dates from 1863. It has clay-plastered walls and a high, open ceiling supported by thick wooden beams.

At the entrance to the hall is a cooking area with an earthen floor, complete with three wood-fired cookstoves (*kamado*) and space for food storage. The rest of the kitchen has a raised wooden floor with a hearth (*irori*) and a dining area. The Kitchen and Dining Hall is built over a well that supplies water from a spring some 18 meters underground.

The hall was built to replace an earlier structure to meet the needs of the growing temple community. Around the time of the building's completion, meals would have been prepared for up to 100 priests and pilgrims. The Kitchen and Dining Hall is designated an Important Cultural Property.



10 Temple Office (Shoin)

The Temple Office was the administrative center of the temple, where the priests kept accounts and records and studied Buddhist texts. It was completed in the mid-eighteenth century and remained in use until the early twentieth century. The three rooms of the Temple Office are connected by a corridor, with sliding panels along its length that were opened to provide natural light for the priests to work.

One of the rooms contains a full-size reproduction of a pair of decorated folding screens gifted to the temple in the eighteenth century. The gilded screens are painted with scenes of Kyoto, including famous sites such as Nijo Castle and Kiyomizudera Temple. Calligraphy sets, lacquerware, and other treasures from the temple collection are exhibited in the far room. The Temple Office is designated an Important Cultural Property.



12 Family Altar (Onaibutsu)

The private altar room of the abbot and his family is connected to the Living Quarters. Every morning, after leading morning prayers in the Main Hall, the abbot prays here on his way back to his quarters.

The altar room is decorated with black lacquered panels and wooden transoms carved with lotus flowers and birds. These contrast with the blue panels of the coffered ceiling, which are painted with delicate flowers. The altar contains a figure of Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. The Family Altar was built along with the Living Quarters in the mid-eighteenth century. The Family Altar is designated an Important Cultural Property.



11 Living Quarters (Okushoin)

The private living quarters of the abbot and his family are connected to the Temple Office, and the two buildings were built at the same time, in the mid-eighteenth century. The design of the Living Quarters reflects the status of the abbot: the floors are raised higher than those of the adjoining Temple Office, and the wall panels and sliding doors are decorated with gold leaf. The woodwork around the room has gilded, ornamental nailhead covers. The abbot's quarters are closed to the public but can be viewed from the Temple Office. The Living Quarters are designated an Important Cultural Property.



13 Goryoya Mausoleum

This mausoleum was built in 1810 to honor Maeda Harunaga (1745–1810) and Maeda Narinaga (1782–1824) for their support of Shokoji Temple. They were the eleventh and twelfth heads of the Maeda family, the daimyo lords of the Kaga domain (present-day Toyama and Ishikawa Prefectures), from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.

Harunaga entered Shokoji Temple as a child and was ordained as abbot at the age of 11. He served at the temple until his mid-twenties, when he returned to secular life to become daimyo of the Kaga domain. He remained a strong supporter of the temple and helped finance the construction of the Main Hall in 1795. Narinaga was Harunaga's adopted son and became daimyo in 1802 after his father abdicated. He continued the family's financial support of the temple. The Goryoya Mausoleum is designated an Important Cultural Property.



雲龍山勝興寺



❖ Shokoji Temple ❖

Shokoji was established in 1471 as a temple of the Jodo Shinshu, or True Pure Land, school of Buddhism. Jodo Shinshu teaches that all people, regardless of status or background, are equal before the Buddha. This was particularly appealing to the common people and contributed to the school's widespread popularity. Shokoji's history reflects the strong local support of its followers. Almost all the structures on the grounds date from the Edo period (1603–1867), and the temple complex looks much as it did in illustrations preserved from 1803.

❖ Architectural heritage ❖

The temple complex consists of 12 buildings, all of which are designated Important Cultural Properties. In particular, the Main Hall, the Reception Hall, and the Entrance Hall are National Treasures recognized for their architectural and historical significance. In the late nineteenth century, many temples were destroyed or had their land holdings reduced when the new Meiji government (1868–1912) declared Shinto the official religion. As such, it is rare to find a temple complex largely unchanged and with so many buildings from a single historical period.

❖ Turbulent history and relocation ❖

During the late fifteenth century, Shokoji Temple was a base for militant groups engaged in a series of uprisings known as Ikko-ikki. These revolts were led by Jodo Shinshu practitioners, including farmers and merchants, against daimyo lords and the samurai class to oppose what they saw as unfair taxation and social conditions. Shokoji was burned to the ground during these uprisings and was rebuilt at its current site (presentday Takaoka, Toyama Prefecture) in 1584.

❖ Support of the Maeda family ❖

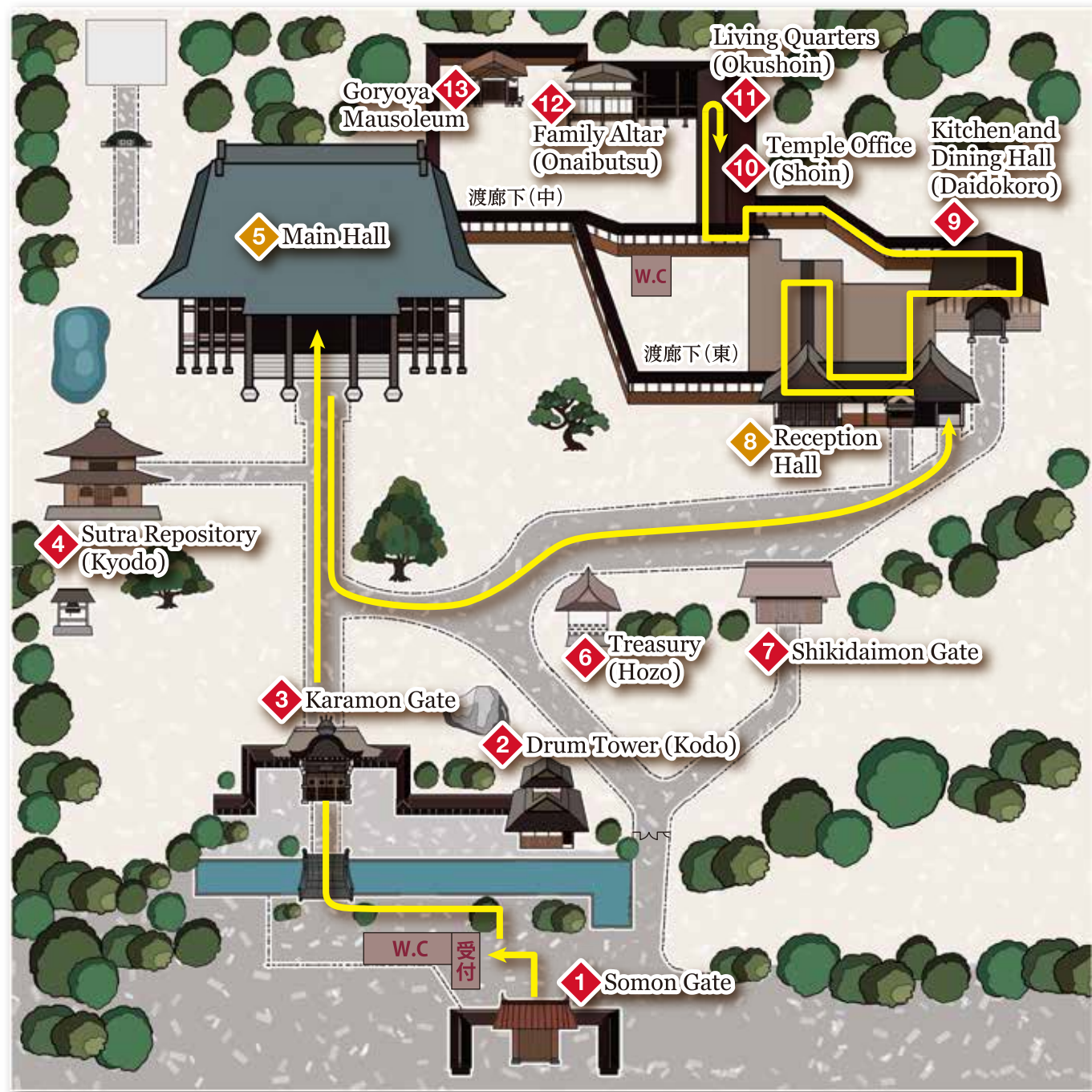
Shokoji flourished during the Edo period with the help of the powerful Maeda family. As daimyo of the Kaga domain (present-day Toyama and Ishikawa Prefectures), they protected and financially supported the temple. This was despite the temple's past involvement in the Ikko-ikki movement and ongoing tensions between some Jodo Shinshu practitioners and the ruling class. Their backing was likely a move to gain favor with the local populace and quell further uprisings. Several sons of the Maeda family served as abbots, and the family granted land and contributed funds to expand and improve the temple.



Japan Tourism Agency
Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism

This English text was written based on interviews by a native English writer as part of the Japan Tourism Agency's Promoting Multilingual Support for Sightseeing Destinations around Japan project in FY2024.

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National Treasure

5 Main Hall (Hondo)

The current Main Hall was built in 1795 and is dedicated to Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. The hall's grand size reflects the influence of the Jodo Shinshu, or True Pure Land, school of Buddhism during the Edo period (1603–1867) and the historical importance of Shokoji as the main Jodo Shinshu temple east of Kyoto.

The hall covers an area of approximately 1,450 square meters and is supported by 122 pillars, each around 9 meters tall. The inner sanctum represents the Western Pure Land, the paradisaical realm of Amida Buddha. It is lavishly decorated with gilded walls and pillars, carved transoms, and painted ceiling panels. Worshippers pray facing west toward a gilded statue of Amida Buddha in the hope of being reborn in the Western Pure Land. The Main Hall is designated a National Treasure.



8 Reception Hall (Ohiroma)

The Reception Hall dates from 1653 and is the oldest surviving structure at Shokoji Temple. The abbot received influential visitors here in the Edo period (1603–1867), likely including imperial envoys and representatives of local daimyo lords. At the far end of the room is a small area with a raised floor where visiting nobles would have been seated during these meetings.

The main room of the Reception Hall is around 225 square meters, which is unusually large for a regional temple. It was expanded to its present size in the eighteenth century, at the height of the temple's prestige. The seating area was extended with an extra row of tatami mats, and a separate entrance hall (*shikidai*) was constructed, complete with a waiting room.

The original layout of the main reception room is depicted in illustrations on display in the Reception Hall. The expansion of the Reception Hall attests to Shokoji's importance as the main Jodo Shinshu temple east of Kyoto. The Reception Hall and the adjoining Entrance Hall are designated a National Treasure.



Important Cultural Property

1 Somon Gate

When the doors are open, the main gate to Shokoji Temple frames a view of the Drum Tower. The gate is almost 9 meters tall and over 5 meters wide. It has a tiled, gabled roof supported by four thick wooden pillars. Two smaller tiled roofs are set at right angles below it to protect the pillars and the gate doors (when open) from the weather. The ceramic finials on the main roof, in the shape of mythical sea creatures (*shachihoko*), are believed to protect against fire.

This type of gate, called a *koraimon*, is typically used in castle architecture. It is rare to find a large *koraimon* gate at a temple. The gate was built in 1840. During repair work that began in 1998, a tile was found with an inscription indicating the roof was tiled in 1864. The gate is designated an Important Cultural Property.



3 Karamon Gate

This elegant gate has gently curving gables (*karahafu*) and golden metal fittings on the bargeboards and rafters. Phoenixes and dragons are carved across lintels and under the eaves, and the wooden doors have openwork panels decorated with carved peonies. A wooden plaque above the lintel bears Chinese characters reading “Unryuzan,” part of the temple's formal name, Unryuzan Shokoji Temple. The six-pillar gate is over 10 meters high and 6 meters wide.

Karamon gates were usually reserved for the use of the most distinguished guests, such as imperial envoys and representatives of daimyo lords. They offered access to a temple's reception hall or similar chambers. At Shokoji, the Karamon Gate was used by all visitors. It is believed to have been constructed in 1769 at Koshoji Temple in Kyoto and was relocated to Shokoji Temple in 1893. It is designated an Important Cultural Property.



6 Treasury (Hozo)

The Treasury was built around 1867 to protect important documents, artworks, and other precious objects. It was constructed in the *dozo-zukuri* style, with thick mud walls finished with plaster to protect the contents from fire. The shingled upper roof (*okiyan*) is an independent structure that sits atop the treasury and functions as a weatherproof canopy over the plasterwork.

Many of the items in the Treasury were acquired through the marriages of abbots to the daughters of well-connected families. Some of the brides came from the Maeda family, who ruled the Kaga domain (present-day Toyama and Ishikawa Prefectures), while others were the daughters of court officials or abbots of affiliated temples such as Nishi Honganji Temple in Kyoto.

A selection of temple treasures is exhibited in the Temple Office. The Treasury is designated an Important Cultural Property.



2 Drum Tower (Kodo)

The two-story Drum Tower was built in 1733. It resembles a castle watchtower, with a hip-and-gable roof. A *taiko* drum on the second floor is used to signal the beginning of temple events and festivals. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the drum was beaten for various purposes, such as calling the priests to morning and evening prayers and to signal mealtimes. The Drum Tower is designated an Important Cultural Property.



4 Sutra Repository (Kyodo)

The Sutra Repository was built in 1805 to store sutras. The roof of the square, wooden structure is topped by a *hoju*, or sacred-gem finial—a bronze ball with rising flames—believed to ward off evil. Inside the building is an octagonal wooden cabinet, or *rinzo*, which holds the sutras.

The *rinzo* is around 4 meters high, and each of its 8 sides contains 36 drawers. The cabinet is enclosed with brightly painted doors and revolves on a central axis. It is said that turning the cabinet one revolution is equivalent to reciting all the sutras inside. The painted doors of the *rinzo* were completed in 1829 and depict bodhisattvas, lotus flowers, and phoenixes. The doors of the repository are kept closed to preserve the colors of the paintings, and the building is not open to the public. The Sutra Repository is designated an Important Cultural Property.



7 Shikidaimon Gate

The Shikidaimon Gate was constructed in 1705 and is the oldest gate at Shokoji Temple. It was used by important visitors and has an attached guardhouse, a feature more commonly associated with samurai residences. It is the nearest gate to the Reception Hall, where the abbot met with visiting nobles and large gatherings were held.

The gate is built on thick pillars of zelkova wood, braced by massive lintels. The main doors have bronze plum-blossom-shaped studs, and the lintel above the doors is decorated with wisteria motifs, the emblem of Shokoji Temple. The Shikidaimon Gate is designated an Important Cultural Property.

