

## Our Special Guides for Foreign Dignitaries Delve a Little Deeper into Japan's Attractions!

### Away with Epidemics! The Ancient Jindaiji Temple and Jindaiji Soba



Main gate



Main hall



Approach to temple

Long, long ago, way before the time of Tokyo, Edo, and even Musashino Province, the ancient temple of Jindaiji was founded at an important place of worship by people who loved the abundant spring water there. Have you heard about the lush green Jindaiji temple in Chofu with its diverse attractions and the soba culture lining its approach? Jindaiji is the only temple in Tokyo enshrining a statue of Buddha designated as a national treasure. The temple's deity, Ganzan Daishi, drives away epidemics, and soba noodles are a nutritional food that boosts the immune system. Let me introduce Jindaiji, which continues to play an important role in comforting people in these uncertain times, and its tasty soba.



Thanks to the good offices of Mr. Genyu Kamihara of Jindaiji's public relations department (on the right in the photo), I was able to hear from Mr. Gyoshun Hayashida (left) of the temple's general affairs department. I also received cooperation from Mr. Kazuyuki Ishikawa, chairman of the Jindaiji Soba Association and owner of the Matsuba Chaya restaurant.

Although Jindaiji has lost treasures and buildings on several occasions due to repeated fires over the centuries, it still has many historical halls and Buddhist statues all with their own intriguing stories. Visitors can enjoy a stroll around them, admiring the surrounding greenery as they go, and then finish their tour with a bowl of soba. Or the reverse is possible too, of course. Let's visit the temple in chronological order.



Spring water by the main gate



The corridor connected the main hall and the Ganzan Daishi Hall



Main Hall

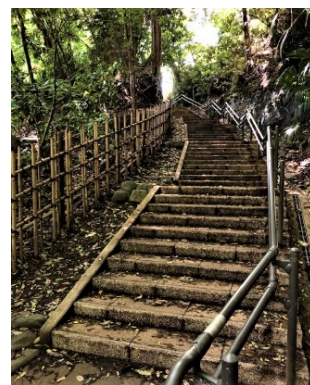
### Ancient Times to Tempyo Era (729–749): God of Water and Matchmaking (Jinsha Daio Hall)



Jinsha Daio Hall



The maple tunnel behind the Jinsha Daio Hall



Steps connecting cliffs

Jindaiji temple, which is located 15 km from Shinjuku in the southwestern part of the Musashino Plateau, is 56 meters above sea level. The lowest point in Chofu, by the side of the Tamagawa river, is 24 meters above sea level. The slope connecting this difference of 32 meters is called the Kokubunji Escarpment, and underground water bubbles up from below the cliffs. People have gathered on this land ever since the prehistoric Jomon period. Many ruins and burial mounds exist, suggesting that this was a place from where people disseminated culture since ancient times.

It was against this background that the legend of Jinsha Daio, the god of water, emerged. The legend has it that Fukuman, the father of the founder of Jindaiji, Manku Shonin, fell in love with the daughter of a village head named Ukon, but her parents disapproved of the match and hid her on an island in a lake. The lovesick Fukuman did



The sculpture of a giant turtle in the Founder's Hall

not give up, however. Recalling the tale of how the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang had been saved by the god of water while traveling across a desert, he prayed to Jinsha Daio, upon which a giant turtle appeared to carry him to the island. The parents then approved of the match, and Manku Shonin was born. To fulfill his father's long-cherished dream, Manku Shonin entered the priesthood and crossed over to China to study

the Hosso Sect of Buddhism. (Yakushiji and Kofukuji temples in Nara still adhere to the Hosso Sect.) After returning to Japan, Manku Shonin founded Jindaiji in 733 as a temple dedicated to Jinsha Daio (forming the name from the "jin" and "dai" characters). This worship of the god of water sprang from people's feelings of deep gratitude for water. Jinsha Daio Hall, which is located down from the main hall near the spring water source, is designated as the oldest building in Chofu; records show that it was built around 1662. There are also many horse-shaped picture tablets (*ema*) here praying for good matchups. Matchmaking has been a wish of visitors for nearly four centuries.

### Hakuho Era (ca. 645–710): Statue of Hakuho Buddha, a National Treasure Protected by Jindaiji (Shaka Hall)



Statue of Shaka Nyorai, a national treasure (center) and replicas of the Yumechigai Kannon statue at Horyuji (left) and the Yakushi Nyorai statue at Shinyakushiji (right) (Photo courtesy of Jindaiji)



**Statue of Shaka Nyorai, a national treasure (Photo courtesy of Jindaiji)**

This statue of Shaka Nyorai (Gautama Buddha, the Historical Buddha), seated with a merciful and gentle face and soft figure, was made in the latter half of the Asuka period (593–710) and is thought to have been brought from Nara to Jindaiji at the time of the temple's founding in 733. The oldest such statue in eastern Japan, it was designated as a national treasure in 2017. It is the only one of Tokyo's three Buddhist statues designated as national treasures to be kept in a temple. (The others are in Tokyo National Museum and Okura Museum of Art.) Because the figure and casting technique are similar to the Yakushi Nyorai (Medicine Buddha) statue at Shinyakushiji temple in Nara and the statue of Yumechigai Kannon (Dream-Changer Bodhisattva) at Horyuji temple in Nara, the so-called Hakuho Buddha statue is thought to have been produced at the same workshop in Nara.

The statue's history has not been entirely serene, though. At the time of Jindaiji's founding, it was the principal image of the temple. But following a great fire in 1865, the reconstruction of the main hall did not proceed well, and the statue was temporarily stored under the pedestal of another statue in the Ganzan Daishi Hall. There it remained until being rediscovered by Mr. Joe Shibata, an assistant at Tokyo Imperial University, in 1909; it was designated as a national treasure under the law of that time. The statue was also placed in a pond at the time of a fire, so, in a way, it was saved by the god of water.

The statue's form of a seated Buddha, with no hair curls and flowing robe, is the Hakuho style. The surface seems to have been painted with gold, but strangely no mercury, which was usually used at this time, has been discovered. One wonders what journey the statue made around 1,300 years ago, probably during the Nara period (710–794), all the way from that workshop in Nara, where the Yumechigai Kannon statue may well have been standing alongside, to Jindaiji. With its faint smile, the Buddha seems to be comforting us living in these troubled times today as well. The statue can be seen in the Shaka Hall, where every care is taken to control the environment for its preservation.

## Heian Period (794–1185): Conversion to Tendai Sect (Main Gate, Main Hall, Founder’s Hall)

When you climb some steps from the approach, pass through the main gate, and then look back, the moss-covered gate with its thatched roof really does appear beautiful. Jindaiji lost many buildings in the great fire of 1865, but miraculously the main gate escaped the misfortune, and the structure built in 1695 remains to this day. The main hall houses a statue of Amida Nyorai (Amitabha Buddha) said to have been made by the monk Eshin Sozu (also known as Genshin; 942–1017). The statue’s crowned figure can be glimpsed from outside.



Main gate



The main gate (looking back from inside)



Main hall

Jindaiji converted to the Tendai Sect of Buddhism following an imperial request by Emperor Junnin (reigned 758–764) to establish “Fugakusan Jindaiji” as a Tendai training center to pray for protection of the country. After that, in about 860, Emperor Seiwa issued an imperial decree, upon which the monk Eryo Kasha (800–859), an outstanding practitioner of esoteric Buddhism on Mount Hiei, came east and set up a training center at Jindaiji to pray for the pacification of a rebellion by the governor of Musashino Province. These episodes provide evidence that Jindaiji was much trusted by the central government at that time.

Climbing some elegant steps from the main hall, you come to the Founder’s Hall, which was built in 1983 to commemorate the 1,250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Jindaiji. The hall houses statues of Manku Shonin, the founder of Jindaiji, and Eryo Kasha. Saicho (posthumously known as Dengyo Daishi), the founder of the Tendai Sect, taught that “Shining light into a corner reveals a national treasure.” In other words, cherish the



Founder’s Hall



Front of the Founder’s Hall

light that each one of us shines into a dark corner. These are words of salvation that keep watch over people even today.

## Kamakura to Edo Period (1603–1868): Ganzan Daishi Drives Away Epidemics (Ganzan Daishi Hall)



Seated statue of Ganzan Daishi (Photo courtesy of Jindaiji)



Ganzan Daishi Hall

After climbing a few steps to the left of the main hall, you can see the wonderfully designed Ganzan Daishi Hall standing in a forest. This hall houses a priestly wooden seated statue of Ganzan Daishi, which at nearly two meters is the largest statue of its kind in Japan. It is rarely shown to the public. The monk Ryogen (912–985), who led the restoration of Enryakuji temple on Mount Hiei and attained the highest rank in the Tendai Sect, was given the posthumous name of Ganzan Daishi because he passed away on January 3. (*Ganzan* refers to the third day of the first month.) The reason why the statue is so big is that, eager to repel the Mongol invasions, the Kamakura bakufu of the time requested Jindaiji to make an awesomely large statue of Ganzan Daishi in the realistic Kamakura style to reflect his extraordinary supernatural power.



The so-called hidden statue is displayed to the public once every 25 years; the next public showing is scheduled for 2034. In 2021, however, it is scheduled to be exhibited at the Tokyo National Museum. Records show that in the past, on a visit to Kaneiji temple in Ueno, they had difficulty getting the massive statue through the front gate.

**Horned master amulets (The amulet with one large face was placed outdoors, and the amulet with 33 faces indoors.)**

Ganzan Daishi became an object of popular worship in the Edo period. Whenever epidemics raged, he would transform into an ogrelike “horned master” and drive away the illness. Ganzan Daishi was a great comfort to ordinary folk, who suffered a lot from the frequent epidemics that struck in the Edo period. At that time, horned master amulets were placed at the entrances to houses around Japan. There was even a popular humorous verse (*senryu*) that went, “Hidden in the New Year’s decorations, the horned master.” Today, such amulets ranging from the scary to the cute can be purchased at Tendai temples, and at Jindaiji the Goma fire ritual is held every day to deliver people’s wishes. No doubt many people these days wish for Ganzan Daishi to display his epidemic-repelling power to quell the current pandemic.



The Goma fire ritual (Photo courtesy of Jindaiji)



Wooden sticks for writing your wishes



(Left) Ganzan Daishi fortune-telling slips  
(Right) *Daruma mikuji* (Buy one of these, and the Daruma [Bodhidharma] stays with you. First, give him a left eye . . .)

Ganzan Daishi was also the founder of the *omikuji* fortune-telling slips sold at temples and shrines in Japan. At Jindaiji, visitors can draw a *daruma mikuji*. This is the original form of the *omikuji*, so “bad luck” messages are quite common.



**Daruma Fair**

In addition, Jindaiji hosts a Daruma Fair on March 3 and 4 of every year. Stores from around the country set up stalls at this event. In particular, since sericulture was a lively industry in these parts from the middle of the Edo period to the Meiji period (1868–1912), the Tama Daruma, which resembles a silkworm, can be seen. The daruma dolls all have different faces, so searching for one to your liking is fun.



**Map of the temple precincts**

## Jindaiji Soba



**Matsuba Chaya** (The restaurant has an old jolcham oak tree measuring more than 30 m in height and 3.6 m in circumference.)



**Chairman Kazuyuki Ishikawa** of the Jindaiji Soba Association



**Nihachi soba** (80% buckwheat flour, 20% wheat flour)



The soil in the vicinity of Jindaiji is andosol (dark-colored), which is more suited to soba cultivation than rice growing. There is plenty of spring water as well, so as far back as the Edo period the famous Jindaiji soba was being presented to the shogun's family and to Kaneiji, one of the Tokugawa mortuary temples. As shown by the poem-inscribed monuments remaining, many poets, such as Ota Nanpo (penname Shokusanjin; 1749–1823), also visited the area to savor this Jindaiji soba. Attracted by the opening of Jindai Botanical Garden after World War II, many restaurants gathered around the temple, creating a unique townscape. The Jindaiji Soba Association was organized; it now has 19 members (one of which is not a restaurant but a souvenir shop). The association holds a soba class for elementary school children, who over a year can experience everything from planting and harvesting to making soba. Other enjoyable activities include Japanese-style summer evening games and soba restaurant stamp rallies.



There are many soba restaurants in the area vying with one another to supply the best taste.



In addition, Jindaiji holds a memorial service for soba on the final Saturday in November every year in what is known as the “tributary soba ceremony.” Even now, the Sobamori Kannon keeps watch over Jindaiji soba. Mr. Ishikawa, chairman of the Jindaiji Soba Association, also stresses the nutritional value of soba. Apparently soba contains a good balance of rutin, lipopolysaccharide (LPS), protein, dietary fiber, and minerals to enhance the immune system and thereby build robust bodies. Soba, he declares “is the ideal Japanese soul food right now!” Another attraction of Jindaiji soba is that the restaurants carefully select soba flour produced in different parts of Japan, so it is possible to eat and compare soba with a variety of tastes.



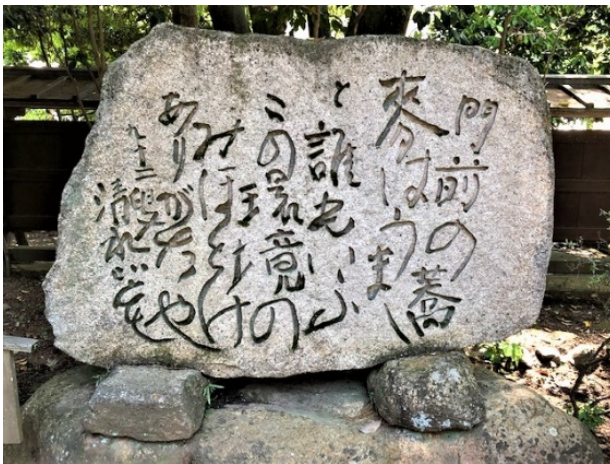
Waterwheel mill

Nearby a waterwheel mill using spring water has been reproduced, complete with a stone mortar and rice polisher; it is managed by Chofu City. Reservations are necessary, but it can be used by the public. The stone mortar does not pass heat to the soba flour, so the flavor is retained. The present mill was reconstructed in 1992 at



The stream water rotates the waterwheel.

a place that local people in about the Meiji period jointly used for flower milling and rice polishing; there is also an attached history museum.



“Everyone says the temple soba tastes good. Thank you, dear Buddha.” (Hian Shimizu)

The vicinity of Jindaiji has many monuments inscribed with verses by poets and writers who visited and were fond of the area (there is a fascinating course taking you around these monuments), as well as such attractions as Jindai Botanical Garden, Jindai Aquatic Botanical Garden, and the Jindaiji Castle ruins. A visit here really does open up another splendidly verdant world.

Cooperation:

Jindaiji Temple: <https://www.jindaiji.or.jp/en/>

Chofu City Regional Information Consortium (NPO): <https://chofu-clic.com/> (Japanese)

Jindaiji Soba Association