

Main Hall of Choji Temple

The Main Hall is the center of worship at this ancient Tendai-school temple, which was founded in the eighth century. The complex, established by imperial decree, served as a spiritual guardian of both the country and the imperial court. The Main Hall building is an important example of the development of early temple design and is designated a National Treasure.

One roof, two halls

The current Main Hall dates to the early Kamakura period (1192–1333) but integrates the frame of the eighth-century structure. From the exterior, it appears as a single hall, with one large hipped roof covering the entire building. However, the structure inherits an earlier “twin-hall” (*narabido*) form of temple design. In this format, temples were built with two halls of equal length, one for worshippers and one for the enshrined deity, separated by a narrow gap. This arrangement emphasized the separation of the sacred space of the Buddha from the secular space of the worshipper. The closeness of the halls, however, meant the roofs had narrower spans, which offered limited protection from the rain.

Innovative design

By unifying these twin halls under a single roof, the Choji Main Hall marks a crucial transition in temple design. The twelfth-century invention of a hidden roof support structure enabled the construction of a large roof over the two halls. This better protected the walls and foundations from heavy rain, and the larger roof span created a spacious entrance that provided a sheltered gathering area for growing numbers of worshippers. The hall is one of only a few surviving examples of this transitional structure in Japan, making it an invaluable example of early Buddhist architecture.

Preservation and rules of conduct

As the hall is both a National Treasure and an active place of worship, visitors are asked to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Footwear must be removed before entry into the Main Hall. Shoe racks and slippers are available near the entrance.
- Photography and the use of phones or other devices within the hall are strictly prohibited.