

Main Hall of Jorakuji Temple

The Main Hall is the heart of Jorakuji Temple, which was founded by imperial decree in the early eighth century as part of a larger temple complex on Mt. Aboshi. The temple was built to guard both the country and the imperial court, which was located to the southwest, in the Nara region. Jorakuji belongs to the Tendai school of Buddhism and is dedicated to the Thousand-Armed Kannon, a manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion. The current Main Hall dates from 1360 and is a rare surviving example of Wayo Japanese style architecture from the Muromachi period (1336–1573). It is designated a National Treasure.

Exterior and architectural style

The Wayo style developed during the Heian period (794–1185) and emphasizes simplicity and elegance through clean lines and natural, unpainted wood. A prominent feature of the building is its hip-and-gable roof. The deep, gently curving eaves create a strong horizontal line, anchoring the structure and giving it a low, wide profile that harmonizes with the surroundings. The softly textured surface of the cypress bark roof gives the entire hall a refined and graceful appearance.

Interior and ritual spaces

Measuring seven bays wide and six bays deep, the hall is large for the Muromachi period. Across the front, lattice shutters that open upward and downward on hinges can be secured by hooks, regulating light and airflow. Inside, the space is organized into three distinct sanctuaries, an arrangement that conforms to the Tendai school's ritual requirements. The outer sanctuary serves as a public space for general worship, while the inner sanctuary—the sacred core—is reserved for monks to perform esoteric rites. The temple's principal image of the Thousand-Armed Kannon is housed in a shrine on the altar in this inner sanctuary, flanked by statues of the Twenty-Eight Guardians, protectors of Buddhism. Though the rear sanctuary is generally reserved for rituals and storage of ritual implements, this area in Jorakuji's hall holds a seated twelfth-century statue of the historical Buddha.

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.