Main Hall

In 1852, the local daimyo of the Awa domain (present-day Tokushima Prefecture) ordered the construction of this Main Hall (Hondo) of Tairyuji Temple. Visible on the front wall are *manji* (ancient symbols for temples and sacred sites), which are sometimes mistaken for Nazi swastikas.

The most significant religious artwork in the hall is a statue of the Buddhist deity Kokuzo Bosatsu carved by one of Japan's most influential priests, Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi). Kokuzo Bosatsu is said to enable people to improve their memory as well as their technical and artistic skills. The deity is also believed to protect people born in the years of the ox and tiger, according to the Japanese zodiac. The statue is displayed on January 12 during an event called Ohatsushiki, when many people come to pray to it.

The temple's inner sanctum is usually closed. Between the stairs and inner sanctum, however, visitors can see votive prayer tablets (*ema*), historical photographs of pilgrims, dragon paintings (legends of dragons are associated with the temple), and candles with wishes written on them. The wishes include safety in the home and car, business success, and good health.

The Main Hall is a designated Tangible Cultural Property.

Daishido Hall

The building was constructed with wood from local cedar and zelkova trees. Ancient Chinese myths and folk tales adorn the intricate carved relief visible at the top of the front wall. Ancient symbols called *manji* (denoting temples and sacred sites), which are sometimes mistaken for Nazi swastikas, are also carved into the wall. Lanterns with intricate phoenix motifs hanging outside and inside the hall recognize people who have made contributions to the temple.

The building behind the hall houses a venerated statue of Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi), a Buddhist priest, calligrapher, and poet who established the Shingon school of Buddhism and is said to have stayed in this building. In his book *Sango Shiiki*, published in 797, Kukai states that he spent time at Tairyuji Temple in ascetic training.

Visitors can follow a corridor around the right side of the front building to reach the building to the rear. Many pilgrims walk in a circle around the first building and stop to pray or chant in front of the rear building, which is almost surrounded by greenery and cliffs.

Head Temple

Tairyuji, meaning "great dragon temple," is the 21st sacred site along the Shikoku pilgrimage route. Visitors standing outside the Head Temple (Honbo) can see a large painting of a dragon on the ceiling of the corridor along the side of the adjoining Jibutsudo Hall.

The painting is said to depict a dragon that protected Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi), a Buddhist priest, calligrapher, and poet who established the Shingon school of Buddhism and is remembered as the founder of the 88-temple pilgrimage on Shikoku. The painting is around 8 meters long and was created by the artist Takemura Shorei (1876–1945).

Since its founding, parts of the temple have been destroyed several times by fire. The Head Temple that stands today is an 1897 reconstruction of the previous structure, which burned down in 1894.

The Head Temple includes an administrative office, living quarters for the head priest and other temple staff, the *gomado* (a room for performing the *goma* fire ritual, which involves burning prayers written on

wooden tablets or paper), and a hexagonal hall where the sutras sacred to the temple are kept and protected.

Ponds and greenery, including giant cedars over five centuries old, surround the Head Temple.

Gumonjido Hall

This building is where dedicated followers of the Shingon school of Buddhism practice the recitation of the mantra of the deity of wisdom and memory, Kokuzo Bosatsu, 10,000 times every day for 100 days. It is said that the completion of this act of devotion—called the Gumonjiho—enables one to develop an extraordinary memory.

Some devoted practitioners of the Shingon school pray to Kokuzo Bosatsu to grant them wisdom. They also pray to the deity to improve their memory, technical skills, and artistic talents.

Tairyuji Temple's Gumonjido Hall is located on a steep, forested slope in the northwest of the temple grounds and is relatively isolated from the other buildings. It is said that one reason Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi), a Buddhist priest, calligrapher, poet, and the founder of the Shingon school, came to this temple when he was 19 years old was to try the Gumonjiho.

Niomon Gate

The two muscular statues flanking the gate to Tairyuji Temple are guardian figures representing deities who protect the temple from harm. They were sculpted during the Kamakura period (1185–1333), making them the oldest and largest Nio statues in Tokushima Prefecture. The gate is also the oldest existing structure on the temple grounds.

The two statues look out and away from the temple with fierce faces expressing determination to protect both the temple and Buddhism from enemies. They also represent the life cycle. The mouth of the right statue is open in utterance of the sound "ah" in the Sanskrit language, which is thought to be the first sound made after birth. In contrast, the mouth of the left statue is closed to make the sound "un," representing the sound uttered at death.

Both guardian deities hold an ancient swordlike weapon called a *vajra* and have well-defined, muscular bodies and clearly visible veins, conveying their power. The long ribbon around their bodies is a *ten'ne*, the celestial scarf that heavenly beings are thought to wear.

Pilgrims and others walking the ancient path from Kakurinji Temple to Tairyuji Temple pass through this gate before entering the temple grounds. Visitors who take the cable car to Tairyuji Temple should look for signs directing them to the Niomon Gate.

Gomado Hall

This copper-roofed building dates from 1901 and features statues of various deities and a place for a sacred fire. It is the site of the *goma* fire ritual, an important rite that many Buddhist temples perform for parishioners. Those who want the ritual performed for their benefit write their prayers, often for health, success, or good fortune, on wooden sticks called *gomagi*.

Priests chant Buddhist scriptures in front of a sacred fire, tossing the sticks into the flames. The smoke is said to carry the prayers to Fudo Myo-o, who is also called the Immovable Wisdom King and the Fire God. Fudo Myo-o has a ferocious face but is thought to be a benevolent deity with many powers, including the ability to assist people in achieving their goals.

The Fudo Myo-o sculpture housed in this building was carved in the early twelfth century by a Shingon Buddhist priest named Kakuban (1095–1143; posthumously known as Kogyo Daishi).

The *goma* fire ritual has reportedly been carried out daily at Tairyuji Temple since 793, when Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi) is said to have studied there. Kukai is the founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism and the founder of the 88-temple pilgrimage on Shikoku.

Mt. Shashingatake

On this high, rocky mountain peak, the founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism, Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi), recited a mantra a million times when he was 19. He went on to become one of Japan's most influential religious figures.

The recitation ritual performed by Kukai is called Kokuzo Gumonjiho. Kukai wrote in his book *Sango Shiiki* that he practiced the ritual because he believed it would enhance his powers of memorization and understanding of Buddhist scriptures.

Today, visitors can hike from Tairyuji Temple, where Kukai stayed, to Mt. Shashingatake. A bronze sculpture of Kukai, depicting him as he might have sat while chanting, has been placed on that sacred spot. On a clear day, the sculpture can be seen from the cable car that stops at Tairyuji Temple. The sculpture is titled *Master of Meditative Training*.

Mt. Shashingatake is approximately 800 meters from the temple complex and can be reached in around 20 minutes on foot along a paved and then gravel-covered path. It is relatively flat, but there is a steep incline near the statue that is perched on the edge of a cliff. Along the way, there are 88 statues representing each of the 88 temples along the Shikoku pilgrimage route.

There are many undocumented stories about Kukai's activities while he practiced and spread Buddhism across Japan. In his book *Sango Shiiki*, however, Kukai makes explicit mention of Mt. Shashingatake and Tairyuji Temple.

Tahoto Pagoda

This two-story pagoda was constructed in 1861 on a hill north of Tairyuji Temple's main hall (*hondo*). The first story is square, while the second story is circular—a construction design associated with the Shingon school of Buddhism.

The temple houses a group of related carvings of the bodhisattva Kokuzo. This Buddhist deity is believed to bestow benefits such as improved memory, academic ability, and artistic skill, as well as protection from natural disasters.

The five Kokuzo statues are referred to as the Five Great Statues of Kokuzo. Each has a specific name and color: white-bodied Hokkai Kokuzo, yellow-colored Kongo Kokuzo, green-bodied Hoko Kokuzo, red-bodied Renge Kokuzo, and black-bodied Gyoyo Kokuzo. Except for their color, the five statues are similar in appearance.

Kokuzo is said to teach five types of wisdom: to recognize truth; to take action; to see into the essence of things; to view all things equally; and to possess infinite memory and knowledge.

Rokkaku Kyozo (Scripture Repository)

This hexagonal building on the east side of Tairyuji Temple was heavily influenced by Chinese Buddhist culture and is considered a valuable architectural style due to its rarity in Japan. It has a copper roof, and each corner is flanked by a five-sided pillar.

Originally the repository held a complete set of handwritten Buddhist scriptures, also known as sutras, that had been donated by the third shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651), but they were all lost in a fire. The currently housed set of sutras, created using book block printing, was placed in this building in 1856.

The sutras are kept in an octagonal wooden storage structure with a wheeled base that allows it to be rotated. It is said that if a person rotates the structure clockwise three times, they will earn the same merit as if they had read all the sutras within.

Rokkaku Kyozo is a designated Tangible Cultural Property.

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