

World Heritage Site

# Chūson-ji Temple

## Michinoku Pilgrimage Four-Temple Journey

Chūson-ji Temple and Mōtsū-ji Temple in Hiraizumi, Zuigan-ji Temple in Matsushima, and Risshaku-ji Temple in Yamagata were all founded by the priest Ennin (Jikaku Daishi). They are also temples that the famous haiku poet, Matsuo Bashō, visited on his Oku no Hosomichi (Narrow Road to the Interior) travels. Collect the shuin (red seals) of the four temples in a special red seal book to receive a commemorative colored paper, or transcribe sutras onto special paper and give them to the four temples to receive a talisman as evidence of your pilgrimage.

Why not visit the four temples as milestones on your Michinoku journey?



## Seasonal Events

New Year's Shrine Visit [from January 1<sup>st</sup>]

Setsubun [February 3]

Spring Fujiwara Festival [May 1-5]

Chūson-ji Temple Lotuses [Mid-July to Mid-August]

Fire-lit Noh [August 14]

Daimonji Festival [August 16]

Chrysanthemum Festival [October 20-November 15]

Autumn Fujiwara Festival [November 1-3]

## Along the Way

Climb up the main approach, called Tsukimizaka (Moon-Viewing Slope), to experience the history of Chūson-ji Temple and the culture of the Ōshū Fujiwara clan firsthand. A temple shuin (red seal), Kanzan incense, Kōnen-cha tea or Kokuhōmai rice will further deepen memories of your travels.



Mobile Site

## Chūson-ji Administrative Offices

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## Chūson-ji Temple

This is the head temple of the Tendai sect of Buddhism in Tohoku. It was founded in 850 by the priest Ennin (Jikaku Daishi). The impressive temple complex was commissioned by Kiyohira, the first Ōshū Fujiwara lord, at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was built to represent the Buddhist Pure Land, to console the souls of all those, whether friend or enemy, who died in two major conflicts at the end of the 11th century. Although many of the halls were destroyed by fire in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the precinct is still a treasure trove of Heian period Buddhist art, with more than 3,000 National Treasures and Important Cultural Assets including Konjikidō (the Golden Hall). 'Hiraizumi – Temples, Gardens and Archeological Sites Representing the Buddhist Pure Land' was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2011.

## 《Important Cultural Property》Kyōzō (Sutra Repository)

The Kyōzō (Sutra Repository), beside the Konjikidō, formerly housed the Chūson-ji Sutras.



Original Heian-era materials were re-used in many places after the Kyōzō was damaged by fire in 1337. The area in front of the hall is a beautiful sight in Autumn, when the red Japanese maple leaves are falling to the ground.





## 《National Treasure》 Chūson-ji Sutras

The Kinginji Kōsho Issaikyō (complete sutras written in alternating lines of gold and silver on dark blue paper) was commissioned by Kiyohira while the Kinji Issaikyō, precious because of its wide variety of decorative illustrations, was commissioned by Hidehira. They represent the highest point of Japan's history of sutra transcription.

More than 100 participants take part in the day-long Lotus Sutra transcription held on the second Sunday of June, keeping the traditions of this "sutra transcription temple" alive to this day.



## Hondō (Main Hall)

The principal image of Chūson-ji's Main Hall is a jōroku (5.3m) Shaka Nyorai (Historical Buddha). A monthly memorial service for the four generations of the Fujiwara clan members, Tendai sect ancestral memorial services, day-long Lotus Sutra transcription, and other Buddhist rites are performed here. Inside are eternal flames, lit from one in the Tendai sect's main temple, Enryaku-ji, which is reputed to have burned since being lit by the sect's founder Saichō (Dengyō Daishi) more than 1,200 years ago. Family memorial services, zazen meditation and sutra transcription are also held here.



Hon-dō (Main Hall)

## Sankōzō (Museum)

The Sankōzō contains more than 3,000 National Treasures and Important Cultural Assets. You can see Buddhist statues and objects, sutras, documents, Fujiwara clan burial accoutrements etc., in the exhibition rooms.



Sankōzō (Museum)

## 《National Treasure》 Konjikido (Golden Hall)

Completed in 1124, this hall is unique. The principal image is Amida Nyorai (the Buddha of Infinite Light) with Kannon (the Bodhisatva of Compassion) on the right and Seishi (the Bodhisatva of Wisdom) on the left. Six Jizō Bodhisatvas (Saviors from Hell) and two Guardian Kings, Jikokuten and Zōchōten stand in front. Almost all of the hall is covered with gold-leaf and represents the radiant western Pure Land (gokuraku) or Land of Utmost Bliss.

The inner sanctuary, lavishly decorated with raden (inlaid lustrous shell), maki-e (gold-sprinkled lacquer) and elaborate carving, is the pinnacle of Heian Buddhist art.

The remains of the first Ōshū Fujiwara lord Kiyohira rest beneath the central altar, those of the second lord Motohira under the left altar and those of the third lord Hidehira, with the head of fourth generation lord, Yasuhira, beneath the right altar.