



Access



By Train

Take the Katsuyama Eihei-ji Line of the Echizen Railway from Fukui Station (located next to JR Fukui Station) to Katsuyama Station, then take a Keifuku Bus on the Eihei-ji Line and get off at Heisen-ji Jinja-mae bus stop.



By Car

Take the Hokuriku Expressway to Fukui-kita IC, then follow natl. rt. 416 and natl. rt. 157 for 50 min.

Mahoroba Hakusan Heisen-ji Shrine History Museum


66-2-12 Heisen-ji, Heisen-ji-cho, Katsuyama City,
Fukui, 911-0822
Tel.: (0779) 87-6001 Fax: (0779) 87-6002
E-mail: mahoroba@city.katsuyama.lg.jp

Katsuyama City Hall Commerce and Tourism Department, Tourism Policy Division

1-1-1 Moto-machi, Katsuyama City,
Fukui, 911-8501
Tel.: (0779) 88-1111 Fax: (0779) 88-1119
E-mail: kankou@city.katsuyama.lg.jp

Centuries of hidden history.

福井県勝山市
国史跡 白山平泉寺
Hakusan Heisen-ji Shrine, a National Historic Site



Over the years, this thick layer of moss has grown to cover and protect the remains of what was once one of the most significant religious cities in Japan.

Since ancient times, people have held religious faith in the sacred mountain Hakusan, for the fresh water it provided. Hakusan Heisenji Shrine served as a base for this Hakusan faith after it was established in the year 717 by the monk Taicho in Echizen.

During the Warring States era, some 8,000 warrior-monks are said to have lived here, in what was Japan's largest religious city at the time. However, this flourishing city was attacked and burned to the ground in 1574's Ikko-ikki uprising.

The area spent the centuries since in largely undisturbed peace. An archaeological investigation that began in in 1989, however, discovered a number of stone paths, stone fences, and the remains of priests' quarters, bringing this once-major medieval religious city back into focus in the present day.

Former Grounds of Hakusan Heisenji Shrine

Hakusan Heisenji Shrine is also known in Japan as "the Temple of Moss" for the thick layer of moss that covers the shrine grounds in a beautiful green. It is a part of Hakusan National Park, and the path to the shrine is itself considered one of Japan's 100 finest.



Large stones stand along the path, indicating the edge of the outside world; what lies beyond belongs to the gods. Once you hear that, doesn't the scenery seem different?

These two boulders mark one border of the vast Hakusan Heisenji Shrine — passing through these various borders is said to purify the body. The stone path leading in is made with stones from the riverbed of the Kuzuryu river, and is believed to be about 1,000 years old.

Former Temple Path (Ox Rock & Horse Rock)

On the left is Ox Rock, with Horse Rock on the right. During the Ushi-no-Koku Mairi prayer ritual, performed in the middle of the night, these rocks are said to transform into an ox and a horse, blocking the path: if one is frightened off and turns back, their wish will go unheard, but if one continues past, it is said that their prayer will come true.

**The stone stairs begin at the first torii gate.
Untold thousands have walked this path to and from this historic city.**

The beauty of the cedar trees and moss gives this path a sacred and mysterious air. This is the place where the general Kiso Yoshinaka prayed for victory in battle against the Taira clan, as well as a place Minamoto no Yoshitsune and Benkei visited on their way to Oshu (in northeast Japan) while pursued by Minamoto no yoritomo's forces. The then-head of Heisenji is said to have deliberately overlooked the disguised Yoshitsune and his men.

Path from the First Torii Gate

Visitors can enter the Former Genjoin Garden, a National Place of Scenic Beauty, which was built during the Muromachi era (1336–1573). (¥50 admission fee)



**A freshwater spring with 1,300 years of history,
and the source of Heisenji's name.**

Mitarashinoike Pond

The sacred forked cedar tree here represents the three peaks of Mount Hakusan: Gozengamine, Onanjimine, and Bessan. The foundation stones of a torii gate can be found nearby.

In the year 717, the monk Taicho discovered this spring — the “sen” in “Heisenji” meaning “freshwater spring” in Japanese — during his journey to the sacred mountain Hakusan.

A goddess appeared at the spring, and instructed Taicho to go climb Hakusan. The cedar tree to the east of the spring, with a trunk that splits into three, is a sacred tree said to have been planted by Taicho himself.



**Just 1% of the remains have been unearthed.
Let your imagination take over to experience
the poetic history that rests here.**

The archaeological investigation at Hakusan Heisenji Shrine began in 1989. In the 25 years since, only 2 hectares of the 200-hectare grounds have been explored — who knows what the other 99% will teach us about history?

**Unearthed Medieval
Stone Path**

This medieval stone path was made with stones from a dry riverbed, and was one of the largest in Japan at the time. Most of the paths on the grounds of Heisenji are made of stones, and some of these featured a gutter to one side, believed to have been at the cutting edge of technology at the time.



The Great Cedar Tree of Wakamiya Hachimangu Shrine

Can be found in the corner of the 3,600 Priests' Quarters of Minamidani, currently the site of archaeological investigation and maintenance. Old pictures show that this is just one of the 48 shrines that once stood on the grounds of Hakusan Heisenji Shrine.

The survivor of a terrible battle. This 450-year-old tree has much left to tell us.

This tree, one of the Seven Cedar Trees of Heisenji, is said to have survived when Heisenji was burned to the ground in 1574. Its appearance quietly suggests that this was considered a special place even in ancient times.

Three shrines for Hakusan's three peaks. The number three is a recurring symbol at Heisenji.

The sacred mountain Hakusan has three peaks: Gozengamine, Onanjinime, and Bessan. Hakusan Heisenji Shrine features three shrines, centered around Gozengamine Shrine, and each of the three is dedicated to a different god. Gozengamine Shrine is said to have once featured three gabled roofs, to represent the integration of the three into a single whole.

Gozengamine Shrine

Dedicated to the god of Gozengamine, the main peak of Hakusan. The eaves are supported by beautiful ascending and descending dragons. The current building used as Gozengamine Shrine was built in 1795 as a contribution from Matsudaira Shigetomi, the 12th lord of the Fukui Domain.



The changing colors of each season mean that a different atmosphere will greet you each time you visit Heisenji.



An exceptionally large hall of worship shown in old pictures.

A map of Heisenji from the Edo era (1603–1868), shown on p. 15, describes a "33-ken [a traditional unit of length] hall of worship." Today, only a portion of its foundation stones remain. The priests of Heisenji would all gather there at the same time, indicating that it must have been a truly vast building.

Hall of Worship (Haiden)

A hall of worship some 83 meters long once stood here; the building found here today was built in the 1850s. An ema wooden votive tablet (designated a cultural property by Katsuyama City) is kept inside, and is shown to the public only on New Year's Day.



No meat or fish allowed from this point on! Have you prepared yourself spiritually?

Long ago, it was forbidden to take meat or fish up this hill, earning it the name "Shojin-zaka hill," after Shojin-ryori Buddhist cuisine. The stone steps are smooth, presumably because so many people came and went on this path that even their straw sandals gradually wore the stone down.

Shojin-zaka Hill

Located at what is now the entrance of the Hakusan Heisenji Shrine grounds. At the top of this hill is the first torii gate, after which is a path that continues to the second torii gate.



The remarkable story of two brothers' competition to move this rock.

During the mid 16th century, the main shrine underwent major repairs, as did its stone fence. It was believed that those who contributed larger stones possessed greater influence, so two brothers fought to try to dig up this especially large stone.

Muhon Rock

There is a story of two brothers who were priests, who competed to see who could bring larger stones to build the stone fence around the main shrine. The older brother, Hokoin, couldn't carry this rock, and he plotted to destroy his younger brother, Gyokusenbo, in front of this rock. As a result, this is now known as Muhon ("revolt") Rock.



Burned to the ground 850 years after its founding. And even that was 450 years ago.

It has been some 450 years since Hakusan Heisenji Shrine was destroyed. To think that Heisenji was founded by Taicho over eight centuries before even that — it's quite impressive to think that one place's history can stretch back so far, isn't it?

The Origins of Hakusan Heisenji Shrine

When Heisenji was founded during the Nara era (710–794), it was originally centered around Mitarashinoike Pond, but during the Kamakura era (1185–1333), it expanded into the mountains. Later, during the Muromachi era (1336–1573), Heisenji began to use city planning principles in its development.

More Places to Explore Nearby to Further Enjoy Heisenji



Mahoroba Hakusan Heisenji Shrine History Museum

Learn all about Hakusan Heisenji Shrine here, with displays of unearthed remains and other historical information available through touchscreen displays and high-definition videos. Visitors can also learn about the Hakusan faith, which started alongside the founding of Hakusan Heisenji Shrine, through items found by the archaeological investigation that have shed new light on what we know about the past. This museum offers chances for hands-on learning, with new events held each month. There's something here for people of all ages, making it the perfect base for exploring the Heisenji area.

Tel.: (0779) 87-6001
Hours: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (last admission 4:30 p.m.) **Admission:** Free
Closed: Wednesdays (or the following day if Wed. is a holiday) and year-end/new year holidays

Minamidani Excavation Site

According to a picture depicting the Heisenji Temple Grounds, 3,600 priests' quarters were located in Minamidani. The remains of priests' quarters from over four centuries ago were found in the ground here, and the archaeological investigation is ongoing. The way the stones are arranged and the evenly spaced entrances indicate that Heisenji used some of the most advanced city planning and construction techniques available in Japan at the time.



**Kanan-sansai
Glazed Ceramic
Brush Rest**
This brush rest's shape is based on the sacred Mt. Meru from Buddhist teachings. These are rarely unearthed in Japan.



Fired Ceramics
The glaze has been melted onto it through intense heat. Believed to be from the 1574 fire.



Stone Stove
This stove used to boil water for the tea ceremony was made from Fukui's distinctive shakudani stone. A number of other items used for the tea ceremony have also been unearthed.



**Yingqing Porcelain
Kannon Statue**
Produced in China during the Yuan dynasty. Together with other unearthed ceramics made in Vietnam and throughout Japan, these help paint a picture of the era's trade and distribution.



Slag & Crucible
Slag consists of the impurities from refining iron. Priests processed metal at their quarters, and produced a wide variety of items.

Armor
Unearthed from the remains of a storehouse in the priests' quarters. This section of armor was worn on the side of the body.



Hakusantei
This establishment, located in front of Shojin-zaka hill, has been a favorite place for visitors for half a century. In addition to local souvenirs from Katsuyama, Hakusantei offers the "Heisenji set" made with ingredients from the Heisenji area, as well as handmade sweets.
•Tel.: (0779) 87-0307
•Hours: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
•Open 365 days a year.



Anokura
With its beautiful traditional white-walled storehouse architecture, Anokura and the adjacent restaurant Hakusantei make a great place to stop while visiting the area. From time to time, photos and pictures related to Heisenji, as well as everyday items once used by people in the Heisenji area, are placed on display here.
•Hours vary.



Tonokura
Built on the former location of the Tojinbo priests' quarters — related to Fukui's famous Tojinbo Cliffs — Tonokura serves as a place to get information. The first floor provides sightseeing information and detailed information about the area, and regularly uploads new informational videos to the internet. The second floor is used as a rest area where visitors can relax.
•Hours vary.



**Dipper, Grinding Bowl,
and Knife**
The bent handle is a distinctive feature of dippers from medieval Japan. The many food-related items that have been unearthed at Heisenji suggest that many people lived here.

Stories from Heisenji

1 Remains of Tojinbo Priests' Quarters

Toward the end of the Heian era (794–1185), there was a priest at Hakusan Heisenji Shrine named Tojinbo. His violent tendencies led many to hold grudges against him. At a banquet in the year 1182, the other priests got Tojinbo drunk and threw him off a cliff. Based on this story, these sheer rocky cliffs came to be known as the Tojinbo Cliffs, and are now one of Fukui Prefecture's most famous sightseeing destinations. Interestingly, it is also said that Tojinbo was accomplished in both martial arts and scholarship.



Tojinbo Cliffs (Mikuni-cho, Sakai City)

2 Benkei's Footprint

There are small depressions in a stone, shaped like feet, in front of the memorial tower to Taicho built in the Muromachi era (1336–1573). These depressions in the stone are said to be Benkei's footprints: according to one story, Benkei once rang the bell at Hakusan Heisenji Shrine, then ran to Naruka (in modern-day Eihei-ji-cho) by the time it stopped ringing. Legend has it that stepping in these footprints will make you run faster.

3 Former Genjoin Garden

Hakusan Heisenji Shrine was attacked and burned to the ground during 1574's Ikko-ikki uprising. During the Edo era (1603–1868), the Genjoin priest quarters were considered central among all of the priests' quarters, and lent strength to the efforts to restore Hakusan Heisenji Shrine. Today, it serves as the shrine office.

4 The Cedar Tree Wrapped around a Foundation Stone

Climb the stairs at the front of Mitarashinoike Pond and you'll find a foundation stone for a torii gate that once stood here. The cedar tree that has grown to cover this stone serves as an undeniable demonstration of the slow but steady passage of time over the centuries here.



5 Where Shinto Crosses Paths with Buddhism

The path running east-west, from the second torii gate to the Shinto main shrine, meets the path running north-south, from the southern gate to the Buddhist Kodo (Lecture Hall) ruins at this point. Perhaps there's something special about this intersection.

6 Ascending and Descending Dragons

The main shrine features two carvings of dragons, both of which are must-sees.



7 Sannomiya

The shrine located deepest within Hakusan Heisenji Shrine. Sannomiya serves as the starting point for the Echizen Zenjodo path, which extends from the Echizen area of present-day northern Fukui prefecture to Mt. Hakusan. The grave of the samurai Kusunoki Masashige is located in front of this shrine.



8 Minamidani Yakui-mon Gate (Restored)

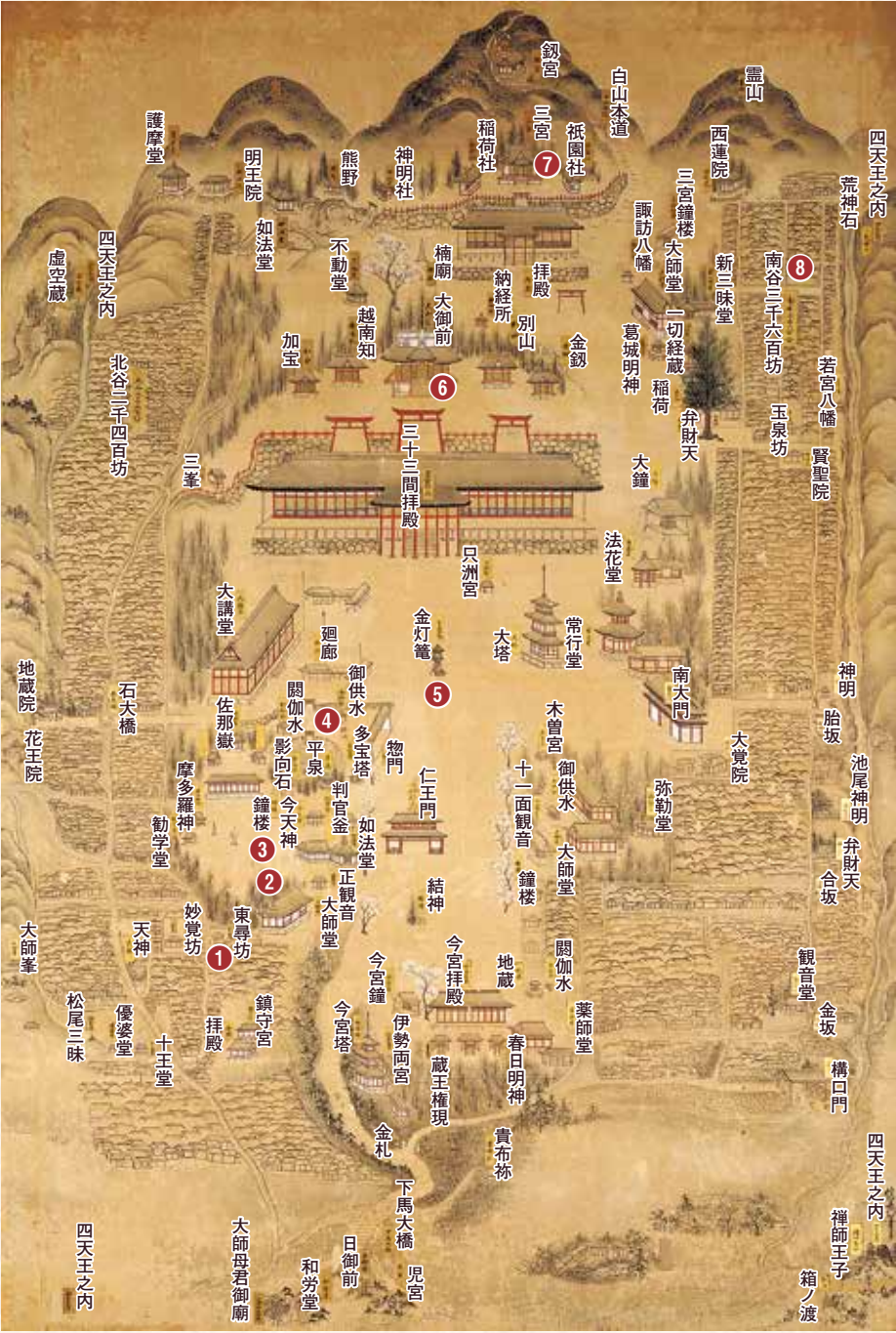
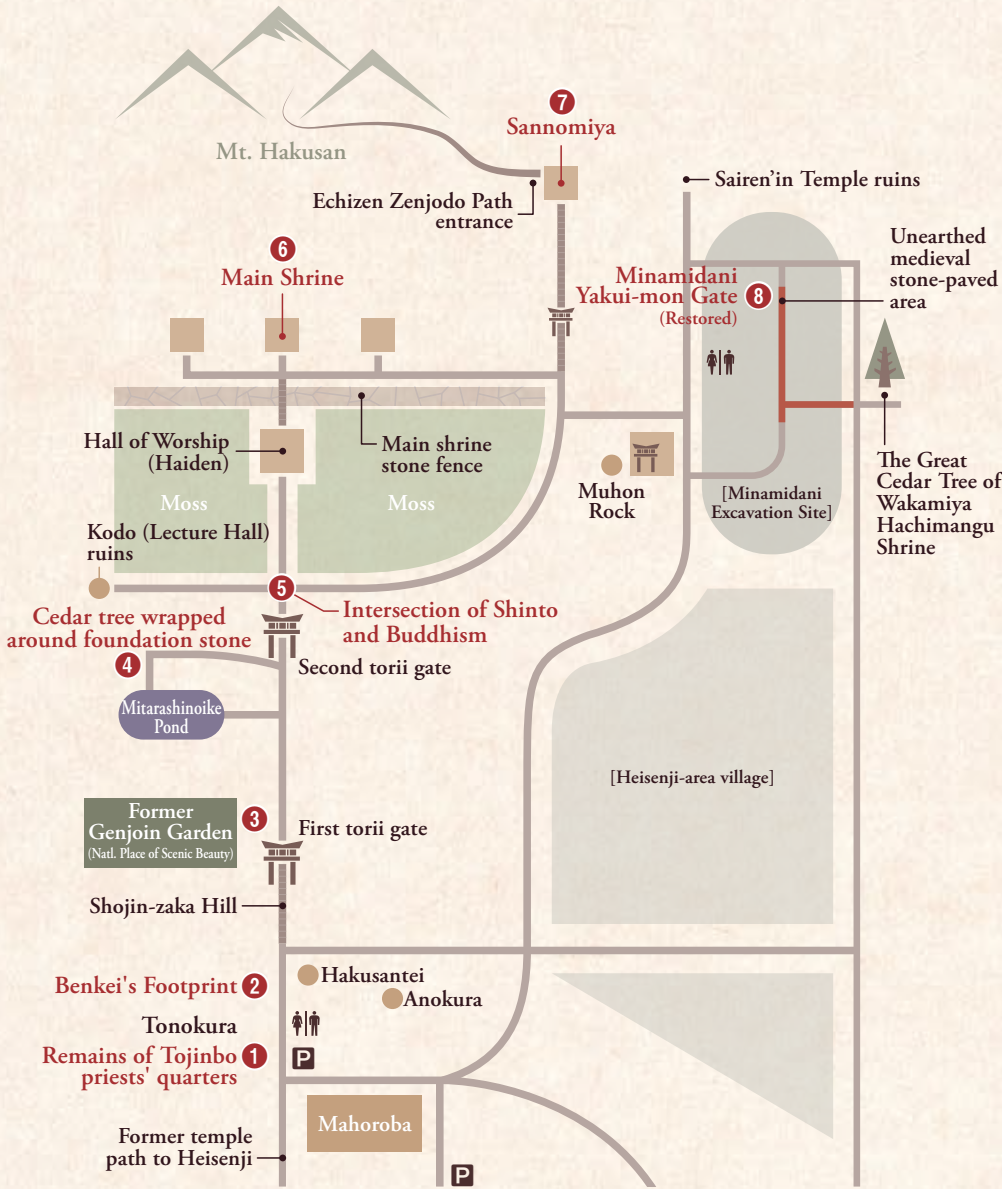
The gate and mud walls for the priests' quarters that once stood in Minamidani, reproduced based on archaeological findings. The foundation's unearthed stone fence has been put back in place, and the walls were restored using the same techniques that were used back when they were built.



The History of the Name "Katsuyama"

Murokoyama Castle was built in Ontateyama by the Ikko-ikki forces, who fought against Hakusan Heisenji Shrine. While the Heisenji side's forces were focused on the battle at Murokoyama Castle, the Ikko-ikki forces took advantage of this chance and burned Hakusan Heisenji Shrine to the ground. The Ikko-ikki forces referred to Ontateyama, the site of their battle, as "Kachiyama" ("victory mountain"); in the centuries since, the city's name has come to be pronounced "Katsuyama."

As you walk around Heisenji, compare the modern-day map on the right with the centuries-old drawing on the left to get a feel for where things both are now and where they once stood.



Chugu Hakusan Heisenji Shrine Grounds Map, from the Hakusan Heisenji Shrine collection