

This fall, Kyoto National Museum is holding a special exhibition introducing Tōfuku-ji, one of Kyoto's most important Zen temples.

Maybe you've heard about its beautiful autumn leaves... Or perhaps you've seen pictures of its checkerboard-like moss garden...

However, there's much more to Tōfuku-ji!

京都国立博物館
KYOTO NATIONAL MUSEUM

Guide to the Special Exhibition

Tōfuku-ji

October 7, 2023–December 3, 2023

Tōdai-ji
東大寺
↓
Kōfuku-ji
興福寺
↓

Tōfuku-ji
東福寺

Wow,
its name comes from two of the most important temples in Nara!



National Treasure. Main Gate, Tōfuku-ji Temple.





Who Built Tōfuku-ji, and When?

Chapter 1: Enni and the Founding of Tōfuku-ji Temple

The first abbot of Tōfuku-ji was a monk named **Enni** (1202–1280). He studied under a great master of Zen Buddhism in China. After Enni returned from his travels, Kujō Michie, the most powerful man in the imperial court, asked him to found Tōfuku-ji.

Tōfuku-ji Temple was built in the 13th century during the Kamakura period. Its name was created by taking one character each from the names of Nara's most important temples, Tōdai-ji and Kōfuku-ji, with the hope it would become the greatest temple in Japan. Having withstood centuries of natural disasters and wars, Tōfuku-ji continues to preserve many treasures to this very day.

Tōfuku-ji is home to
7 National Treasures and
98 Important Cultural Properties



Important Cultural Property, **Enni**, Kamakura period, 13th c., Tōfuku-ji Temple (on view in Part I)



This is the great master who taught Enni in China. Look at his expression it's so realistic, he almost seems alive!

Important Cultural Property, **Wuzhun Shifan**, Inscription by Shigu (dates unknown), China, Southern Song dynasty, dated 1254. Tōfuku-ji Temple (on view in Part II)

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The Monks of Tōfuku-ji

Chapter 2: The Formation and Development of the Shōichi Denomination

Continued on the back Doesn't
his face
look kinda
familiar?

The followers of Enni were known as the “Shōichi Denomination.” They worked diligently to pass on their master’s teachings. Enni had many dedicated students who, like their teacher, traveled to China to learn more about Zen Buddhism, returning with new knowledge and goods.

Tōfuku-ji has many paintings and sculptures depicting lively monks. It also preserves monks’ robes (*kesa*) and various other objects used in monastic life. These artifacts provide rich insight into the lifestyle and atmosphere of the day.

Looks like
he's holding a hossu!
← OO
What's a hossu?

A **hossu** is ceremonial fly whisk made from a bundle of animal hair or hemp fibers attached to a handle. It was used in ancient India to swat away insects without harming them. In Chinese Zen, it became a ritual implement carried by monks while giving sermons or performing ceremonies.



Important Cultural Property. **Seated Zōzan Junkū.**
Kamakura period, 14th c., Yōmei-in Temple, Kyoto

Priest's Ceremonial Fly Whisk (Hossu) with Black-Lacquered Wooden Handle.
Owned by Sōhō Sōgen (1263–1335). Kamakura period, 13th–14th c., Tōfuku-ji Temple

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An Artist of Legend!

Chapter 3: The Legendary Buddhist Painter Minchō

The Five Hundred Arhats
10 arhats per painting x 50 paintings
= 500 arhats

Minchō (1352-1431) is a renowned Buddhist painter-priest who lived and worked at Tōfuku-ji, leaving an extensive legacy. Until the Edo period, he was one of the most famous artists in Japan!

Art was used as a method of conveying Buddhist teachings. Consequently, paintings played an essential role at temples. Minchō painted not only in ink, but also in colorful pigments to create works of spectacular scale.



Important Cultural Property. **The Five Hundred Arhats.** By Kissan Minchō (1352–1431). Nanbokuchō period, dated 1386. Tōfuku-ji Temple Image from the Tokyo National Museum venue



Artwork Spotlight

Look for the numerous long hanging scrolls painted by Minchō in the galleries. These aren't just ordinary monks. They're actually arhats, Buddhist elders or sages who have undergone rigorous training and acquired special mystical powers. These paintings are masterworks of Minchō's early period. Ten arhats each are depicted in fifty hanging scrolls, for a grand total of five hundred figures.

It took conservators fourteen years to repair and preserve these massive paintings. This is the first exhibition ever in Japan to exhibit all fifty scrolls!

*No. 48 and No. 49 come from the collection of the Nezu Museum in Tokyo; No. 46, No.47, and No. 50 were created or copied after Minchō's time.

Write Your Own Arhat Manga!

Take a close look at the *Five Hundred Arhats* paintings and you will find lots of different facial expressions, some very humorous. Inspired by these paintings, the Japanese museum staff created their own arhat manga (comics), on view in the gallery.

Here is your chance to try your hand at an arhat manga! In this scene, some of the arhats look up at a white serpent, whose mouth is propped open with a priest's staff. Inside its mouth is green-robed monk in meditation. Pretend that you're a manga artist. What do you think the arhat and the serpent are saying?

Since there are fifty scrolls in Minchō's *Five Hundred Arhats*, they are being exhibited in groups. You can see this painting at the KNM from October 24 to November 5, 2023.



Important Cultural Property. **The Five Hundred Arhats** (Scroll No. 17). By Kissan Minchō (1352–1431). Nanbokuchō period, dated 1386. Tōfuku-ji Temple

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Connections and Continuity

Chapter 4: Zen Culture and International Exchanges

After studying Zen in China, Enni returned to Japan with numerous texts and objects. Among them is the over-one-hundred-volume encyclopedia shown on the right.

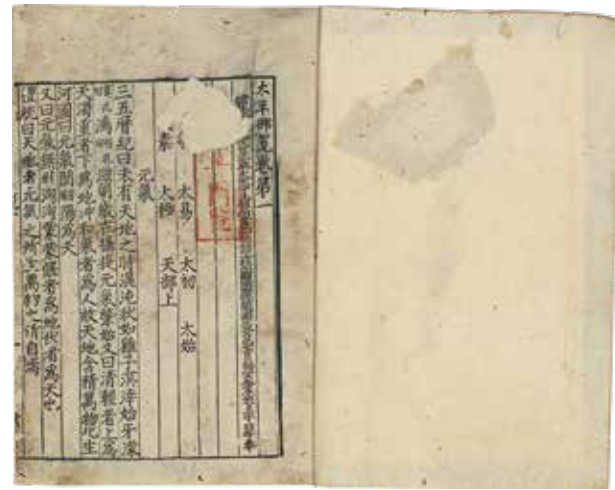
This encyclopedia contains all kinds of information about the nature of heaven and earth, geography, political systems, industries, illnesses, medicines, food, as well as animals, plants, and minerals.

Foreign cultural exchanges involving Tōfuku-ji monks didn't end with Enni. Many of Enni's disciples of the Shōichi Denomination also went abroad. That's why Tōfuku-ji has so many items not only from within Japan, but also from overseas.



An encyclopedia of
over 100 volumes!

It includes sections on
heavens, animals, humans,
and even the supernatural



National Treasure. **Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era (Taiping yulan).** China, Southern Song dynasty, 12th-13th c. Tōfuku-ji Temple.

*Volumes will be rotated during the exhibition period.

5 The Bigger the Better at Tōfuku-ji!

Chapter 5: Tōfuku-ji's Monumental Buildings and Buddhist Sculptures



You can't miss this giant statue of a hand in the exhibition. It's even taller than a person! This is a part of a sculpture of the Historical Buddha that was the principal object of worship at Tōfuku-ji. Unfortunately, the original was destroyed in a fire, so we can't see the whole thing; however, it was clearly a Buddha of gigantic size. Accordingly, the temple buildings and even everyday implements at Tōfuku-ji are all of enormous proportions.

For sculptures, paintings, and objects alike, bigger is better at Tōfuku-ji. In fact, Tōfuku-ji is said to be the largest Zen Buddhist temple in Japan!



? Bonus Quiz!

This giant hand used to be part of a massive Buddha at Tōfuku-ji. How tall do you think the statue was?

- 1 3 meters
- 2 10 meters
- 3 15 meters

If you see the hand itself on view at the exhibition, you should be able to imagine the statue's height!

Hint
00



Buddha's Hand. Kamakura to Nanbokuchō period, 14th c. Tōfuku-ji Temple.

*The answer is on the last page.

Final Words

Even today, there is much we can learn from the rich culture preserved at Tōfuku-ji.

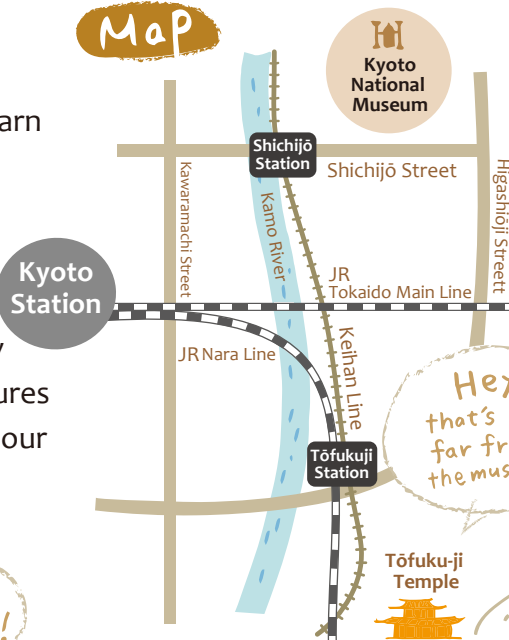
The special exhibition **Tōfuku-ji: Monumental Zen Temple of Kyoto** offers an incredibly rare opportunity to see a rich variety of temple treasures in one place! We invite you to take your time in the exhibition and enjoy the works on view.

Quiz answer

③ 15 meters

Wow, that's huge!

Map



It's huge!

Over 3 meters tall!

Hey, that's not far from the museum!

Tōfuku-ji Temple

Important Cultural Property. **Standing Two Heavenly Kings (Ungyō)**. Kamakura period, 13th century.



October 7–December 3, 2023 Kyoto National Museum, Heisei Chishinkan Wing

Special Exhibition Tōfuku-ji: Monumental Zen Temple of Kyoto

Organized by: Kyoto National Museum; Tofukuji Temple; The Yomiuri Shimbun; NHK (Japan Broadcasting Station) Kyoto; NHK Enterprises, Inc. Osaka Branch Office

Please check the website for information about admission fees, access, and museum closures.

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Special Exhibition Official Website <https://tofukuji2023.jp/>

KNM Webpage, Special Exhibition Tōfuku-ji: Monumental Zen Temple of Kyoto

←••• https://www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/exhibitions/special/tofukuji_2023/

Rotation Schedule

Part I: October 7–November 5
Part II: November 7–December 3

*Additional rotations may occur within each part of the exhibition.