

believed that if a person touches all of the beads, that person will be blessed with a year of good health. Visitors to the prayer hall can also try their hand at the ritual hand-copying of sutras – a highly recommended endeavor for those seeking a meditative activity that will help bring them peace of mind.



5) The Temple Gate of Risshakuji Temple

It is said that this temple gate was built approximately 800 years ago during the Kamakura era. Near this gate is a bell tower that is well-known throughout Japan. Many people gather at this temple on New Year's Eve to hear the ringing of the bell and celebrate the New Year. The bell is also rung on August 15th, the anniversary of the end of World War II.

6) Ubado Hall

Ubado Hall is dedicated to Datsueba, an old watchwoman in Buddhist mythology who sits by the Sanzu River which separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. A small image of Datsueba is enshrined within the temple.



The temple is so small that today it is passed unnoticed by most tourists. However, in days past, pilgrims visited this temple with the purpose of making a ritual offering of the old clothes that they wore, in accordance with a belief that those entering the afterworld may give their old clothes to the watchwoman and put on new clothes before ascending to heaven. The pilgrims regarded the space beyond the temple as heaven, and believed that their souls would be reborn here and ascend to heaven.

7) Yonsun-do Path (The "Four-Sun" Path)

One sun, a traditional Japanese unit of measurement, is equivalent to about 3 centimeters. At its narrowest point, the "yonsun" path is only 14 centimeters, or "4 sun," wide, which is why it came to be known as the Four-sun Path. Originally an animal trail, this path was constructed by Jikaku Daishi in ancient days.

Another name for this path is the Oyako-do, or the "Path for Parents and Children." This name is derived from a Buddhist teaching that all children follow in the footsteps of their parents.

8) Oyasumi Ishi (Sleeping Stone)

According to legend, when Jikaku Daishi first came to Yamadera to establish Risshakuji Temple, he arrived in the evening and found darkness falling all around him, so he spent the night on this stone.

The stone is also called the "Stone of Nirvana" for its resemblance to the Buddha's Nirvana.



9) Semizuka (Cicada Monument)

To honor Matsuo Basho and the famous cicada haiku that he wrote in Yamadera, haiku poet Kochu Sakabe and his associates wrote this haiku on a strip of "tanzaku" paper which they buried in the ground. Upon this site, they erected the Semizuka, or "Cicada Monument."

10) Midahora Cave (Cave of the Buddha of Light)

Eroded by rain and wind over the course of many long

years, this large rock is said to resemble the shape of the Amida Buddha, and it is said that good fortune will come to those who see the resemblance to the Amida Buddha when they look upon this cave. The Amida Buddha is said to reside in a paradise located at the westernmost edge of the universe and to preside over this heavenly land.

11) Niomon Gate

The Niomon Gate is guarded by the statues of two "Nio," or guardians of Buddha, that visitors must pass between, and the fierce glare of these guardians is said to prevent the entry of those with evil hearts. The gate provides a popular photo opportunity for tourists, but it in fact has only a relatively short history. According to documents, this gate was not constructed until the 1840s.

12) Nokyodo Hall (Hall for Copied Sutras)

Priests practicing asceticism in Risshakuji hand copied sutras in Nokyodo Hall. The Lotus Sutra was hand copied by priests in accordance with rules established by Jikaku Daishi which stipulated that for each character of the sutra that was copied, the name of the sutra must be recited three times.

Hand-copied sutras are offered to this shrine on November 28th of each year, and beneath the shrine lies a cave called the "Nyujokutsu," or "Cave for the Dead," where those who attained a spiritual state of perfect selflessness were buried. Some people believe that the bones of Jikaku Daishi himself rest here. Initial excavation surveys of this cave unearthed some remains in 1948, and the most notable discovery was a sculpture of a human head that was found in place of a skull at the head of a skeleton. Researchers have taken note of this sculpture not only for its historical value, but also for its artistic merit.

13) Kaizando Temple

The Kaizando Temple is a temple commemorating the establishment of Yamadera. A wooden statue of Jikaku Daishi is housed in its alcove, and priests serve meals and burn incense here every morning and evening. This temple is also popular as a photo-taking spot for tourists.

14) Godaido Observation Deck

Upon exiting Yamadera Station and looking up at the mountains before you, the first feature to capture your attention may be this observation deck. The construction of this structure upon such a steep hillside was an impressive feat, and many visitors brave the long 1015-step walk up the hillside to enjoy the panoramic view of Yamadera that is visible from this deck.



Rebuilt in 1714, this shrine houses statues of the five "Myo-o," or "Wisdom Kings," in its innermost space.

15) Okuno-In (Innermost Temple)

The Okuno-in, or Innermost Temple, is the final destination of the Risshakuji walking course. Buddhist statues brought by Jikaku Daishi are housed within this temple, and enshrined within the main hall is a 5-meter-tall golden statue of the Amida Buddha.

