

【Name of Heritage site】

Hiraizumi ~Temples, gardens and archaeological sites representing the Buddhist Pure Land~

【Location】

Hiraizumi-cho, Iwate Prefecture

【About the Heritage site】

In the Twelfth Century, Hiraizumi was a political and administrative base situated in the northern part of Honshu, but it was also a realm of Pure Land Buddhism, where temples and gardens translated buddhist visions of an “ideal world” into reality. In Hiraizumi, and its surrounding area, buddhist temples and gardens built by the *Oshu Fujiwara* clan in the Heian Era have been preserved until the present day. These include the “*Konjikido* of the *Chuson-ji* Temple”, which is a national treasure, and the “Garden of the *Motsu-ji* Temple”, an outstanding example of scenic beauty. The world heritage site actually consists of five separate sites, in which the temples and gardens have been designed to represent earthly manifestations of the ideal Buddhist Pure Land. Though not without influences from overseas, these sites, and their representation of an “ideal world” on earth, are examples of a unique architectural tradition that was developed in Japan itself.

【Component sites】

- (1) *Chuson-ji* Temple: site of special historic interest.

The whole complex is designated as a site of special historic interest and contains buildings that were constructed at various dates over one fourth of a century, including a temple constructed by the first *Oshu Fujiwara* lord, *Kiyohira*, in the early twelfth century. The site is also home to a number of national treasures and culturally important halls and buildings including the *Konjikido*, *Konjikido-Ooido* and *Kyozo*, as well as the *Chingo Kokka Dai Garan* (or great monastery for the protection and stabilization of the nation).

- (2) *Motsu-ji* Temple: site of special historic interest and place of outstanding scenic beauty.

This is the site of the ruins of a temple constructed in the mid twelfth century by *Motohira*, a second generation *Oshu Fujiwara* clan lord. It is also where you will find the “*Jodo Teien*” (or Pure Land Garden), which has been designated as a place of outstanding scenic beauty, and the *Jyogyo-do* Hall, which is listed as a site of special historic interest. The *Ennen no Mai* (longevity) dances, and the meditative ritual of constant walking

known as *Jyogyo-zanmai*, have been passed down and preserved at the *Jyogyo-do* Hall, and designated as Important Intangible Folk Cultural properties.

- (3) *Kanjizai-oin* Temple: site of special historic interest and place of outstanding scenic beauty. Located adjacent to the *Motsu-ji* Temple, the *Kanjizai-oin* Temple was built by the wife of *Motohira*. Excavations here have shown that the southern part of the complex was the site of two *Amida-do* halls (dedicated to the Buddha *Amida*), one large and one small, with an *enchi* (or garden pond) at the centre. A “*Jodo Teien*” (or Pure Land Garden) representing the “*Gokuraku Jyodo*” (Pure Land) of *Amida Nyorai* (Buddha of Infinite Light) has also been shown to have formed part of the site at one time.
- (4) *Muryo-koin* Temple Ruins: site of special historic interest.
This site includes the ruins of a temple built in the latter half of the twelfth century by the third lord of the *Oshu Fujiwara* clan, *Hidehira*. With the *Kinkei-zan* Hill to the west, the site includes three floating islands in the *enchi* (or garden pond). Together with the design features of the temple, which had L-shaped covered passages to each side, a *haisho* (place of prayer) and a stage, the spatial composition of the site is considered to be the most developed form of “*Jyodo Teien*” (Pure Land Garden).
- (5) *Kinkei-zan* Hill: historic site.
Kinkei-zan Hill is a 98.6 metre high mountain, and its summit was once the site of a “*kyozuka*” (or Sutra mound). The spatial composition of Hiraizumi itself, a political and administrative base perfected by the ideology of Pure Land Buddhism, is modelled on this important and sacred mountain.