

Project “X” Tours Japan Day by Day: DAY 6

14 MAY



Sonya Savoy and Hiroyo Ueno in
front of Sekisho-in Temple. PHOTO:
Keiko Inoue

Breakfast at hotel. Depart by bus for Koya-san, the headquarters of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism, founded by Kobo Daishi (Kukai) in 816 CE. The Shingon teachings, or mikkyo (secret teachings), have their origin in the esoteric traditions of India and China. Lunch on the way to Mount Koya. Special arrangements have been made for our stay at the Sekisho-in Temple. Dinner and lecture on the temple grounds by

Kurt Kubli Genso, an “ambassador” of the hospitality organization Yokoso! Japan, who facilitates the reception of foreign visitors to the Koya sanctuary. Overnight at the temple monastery.

KOYA-SAN

“After breakfast at the hotel, we bus off to Koya-san, headquarters of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism, founded by Kobo Daishi Kukai in 816 CE.

“We lunch at a nice restaurant along the way – with stops for toilet and store visits, as well.

“We arrive in early afternoon and are met by an English-speaking (Swiss) priest, Kurt Kubli-Genso.

“Following depositing our luggage in rooms at the Sekisho-in Temple monastery, we spend the afternoon touring all the shrines – and the HUGE cemetery in Koya-san.

–Journal entry by Gary Buchanan

Sacred sites and pilgrimage routes in the mountain range of the Kii Peninsula extend for miles and have been recognized by UNESCO as one of Japan’s World Heritage sites. Mount Koya is the major one.

Koya-san is the headquarters of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism and home to one of the first Japanese Buddhist temples in Japan. The sanctuary was first settled in 816 CE by the founder of the Shingon sect, Kobo Daishi (Kukai), as a training hall for the secret teachings (mikkyo) of Shingon, teachings that have their origin in the esoteric traditions of India and China.

After Kobo Daishi was initiated in China as the eighth master of Esoteric Buddhism after only two years of preparation, he returned to Japan, later to found the monastery at Koya-san.

The two main pillars of his teachings were (1) that everyone has the ability to attain enlightenment or Buddhahood (Sokushin Jobutsu) within their lifetime and (2) to bring eternal peace to Japan.



Kobo Daishi

For more on the life of Kobo Daishi (Kukai), read [the article on Kukai in Wikipedia](#).

Okunoin, the mausoleum of Kukai, is surrounded by the largest cemetery in Japan. It is said that Kobo Daishi entered Okunoin with an oath to save people forever. He is popularly believed to be in eternal meditation here since March 21, 835.



"Hall of Lamps" in the cemetery surrounding mausoleum of Kobo Daishi. PHOTO: Jim Elliott

"Here in the sanctuary at Koya-san are planted monuments connected with the Luminous Teaching of the ancient Church of the East (Keikyo).

"I take many photos – the best in front of the Nestorian monument."

–Journal entry by Gary Buchanan



The Irishwoman E.A. Gordon, author of "On Kobo Daishi and the Nestorians in China," donated the replica of the monument erected on Mount Koya, which was dedicated with full Buddhist ceremonial on Sunday, October 3, 1911.
PHOTO: Jim Elliott

Today there are 117 temples in Koya-san, although the broader image is that the whole mountain is one large temple.



Tour guide Kurt Kubli Genso introduces the layout of the temple complex. PHOTO: Jim Elliott

The Head Temple of Koya-san Shingon Buddhism is erected on the site of the residence of Kobo Saishi's first disciple, Shinzen Daitoku.



The rock garden surrounding the Head Temple, completed in 1984, is the largest rock garden in Japan and picturesque throughout the year. PHOTO: Jim Elliott

At the site called Danjo Garan, Kobo Daishi conducted the

groundbreaking ceremony and dedicated his life to the construction of the monastery. The site now consists of nearly twenty structures, including the magnificent Konpon Daito, which is considered to be the central point of a mandala covering all of Japan according to Shingon doctrine. Inside are images of the eight patriarchs of Esoteric Buddhism and sixteen Bodhisattvas (Bosatsu). The main image is of the Five Buddhas: the four Buddhas of the Diamond Realm surrounding the central Buddha Dainichi Nyorai (Mahavairocana) of the Womb Realm. The hall called “Miedo” (“the hall of the honorable portrait”) contains a portrait of Kobo Daishi painted by his disciple Shinnyo and is closed to the public except for a few select people who are permitted to enter on special occasions.



Shrine site on the guided tour of Koya-san. PHOTO: Ron Theriault



Shrine site on the guided tour of
Koya-san. PHOTO: Ron Theriault



Shrine site on the guided tour of

Koya-san. PHOTO: Ron Theriault



Garden at Sesisho-in Temple.
PHOTO: Jim Elliott



Garden scene at Sesisho-in Temple.
PHOTO: Jim Elliott

For a complete virtual tour of the sanctuary of Koya-san, the present-day headquarters of Koya-san Shingon Buddhism, [visit the official web site](#).

MIKKYO LECTURE



Monks serving dinner at Koya-san.
PHOTO: Ron Theriault

"In the evening at dinner in the monastery, Kurt gives a long talk about his mikkyo (secret teachings)."

—Journal entry by Gary Buchanan



Kurt Genso presents
lecture on the present-

day inner teachings of
Shingon. PHOTO: Gary
Buchanan



Sadayuki Hagihara (aka "Kojak")
posing with a statue in front of
the monastery at Koya-san prior to
departure. PHOTO: Ron Theriault

[<DAY 5>](#)

[<DAY 7>](#)