

# PURE LAND HERITAGE

The World Heritage Committee of UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) decided on June 25, 2011, to add Hiraizumi—Temples, Gardens and Archaeological Sites Representing the Buddhist Pure Land to UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Hiraizumi in Iwate Prefecture was the administrative center of warlords of the Fujiwara family in the twelfth century and flourished for four generations, or around 100 years.

The core of Hiraizumi is Chuson-ji temple, which is included in the site added to the World Heritage List. Chuson-ji was built by Fujiwara no Kiyohira (1056–1128), who formed the basis for the prosperity of Hiraizumi. Having lost his father, wife and children, Kiyohira built Chuson-ji based on his philosophy of consoling both friends and foes who died in battle and creating a peaceful society free of war. The construction of Chuson-ji started in 1105 and took a quarter of a century.

The temple is said to have forty halls and pagodas and 300 residences for Buddhist monks. Kiyohira's son Motohira (1105?–1157) and

grandson Hidehira (1122?–1187) carried on Kiyohira's philosophy and built Motsu-ji and Muryoko-in, respectively, both of which were included in the World Heritage.

In addition to Chuson-ji, Motsu-ji and the remains of Muryoko-in, the remains of Kanjizaio-in and Kinkei-san mountain have been World Heritage listed. The reason for the designation of those structures and artifacts as World Heritage sites is that the temples and gardens as a whole that were created based on Pure Land Buddhism, the basis of the philosophy of the Fujiwara family, are well preserved. Pure Land Buddhism is a branch of Buddhism in which people pray for peace and security on Earth while aspiring to go to the Pure Land, where Buddha resides, after death.

One of the buildings representing Pure Land Buddhism in Hiraizumi is the Chuson-ji's Konjikido (golden hall), which was completed in 1124. Konjikido is in Chusonji's Konjikido Oido (covering hall) and is the only building that remains from the time Chuson-ji was built. The inside and outside of Konjikido was covered by gold leaf. The building is decorated with ornaments made of turban shells, metal openwork, and gold and silver lacquer.

"The delicate workmanship seen at Konjikido shows the enthusiasm of Fujiwara no Kiyohira for his beliefs," says a monk at Chuson-ji. "The architecture and fine art of 900 years ago



Autumn leaves add color to the Pure Land garden at Motsu-ji temple. The pond-centered garden was laid out in accordance with the precepts of Japan's oldest garden manual, *Sakuteiki* ("Treatise on Garden Making").

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remain as they were at Konjikido. I want people who visit here to feel the Japanese aesthetic.”

Although Hiraizumi was not directly affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake in March, the number of tourists declined sharply. However, the number is rising again after Hiraizumi was designated as a World Heritage site.

“We are traveling in the Tohoku region to make a contribution to the reconstruction of the region,” says a woman who visited Hiraizumi from Tokyo with her family of four. “The gilded Konjikido is very beautiful. I could sense the feelings of people at that time who hoped for a peaceful world,” she says. 

## Map of the Hiraizumi Sites Listed by UNESCO as World Cultural Heritage

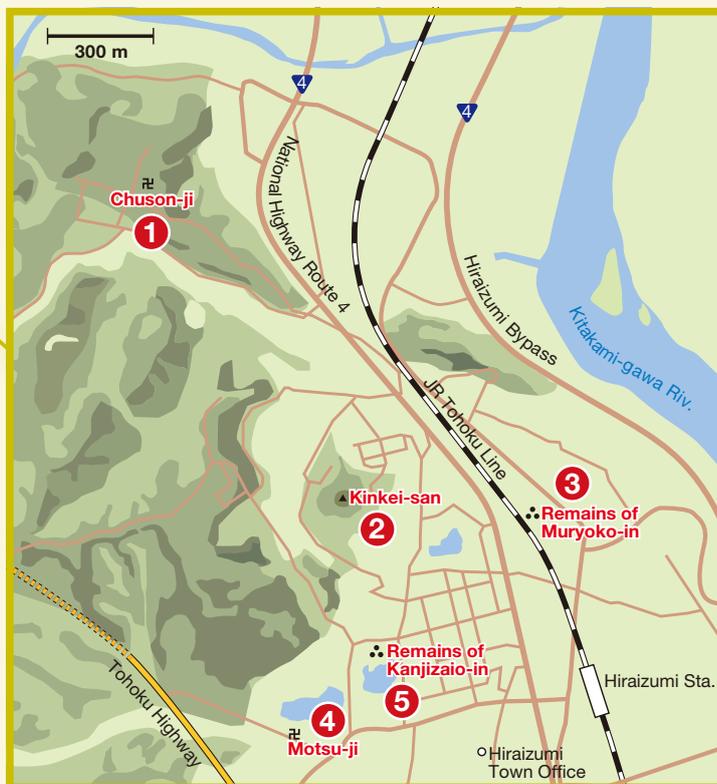
“Hiraizumi—Temples, Gardens and Archaeological Sites Representing the Buddhist Pure Land (Japan)” comprises five sites, including Kinkei-san mountain.

### ① Chuson-ji

There are eleven Buddhist statues in Chuson-ji’s Konjikido Hall. The four bodies of the Fujiwara family rest here. Many buildings of Chuson-ji were destroyed by fire in 1337.

### ② Kinkei-san

Kinkei-san is a cone-shaped mountain that is about 60 meters high. It lies between Chuson-ji and Motsu-ji. As legend goes, a pair of golden chickens, a rooster and a hen, were buried here to protect Hiraizumi.



**Access:** Approximately 2 hours from Tokyo Station to Ichinoseki Station by Shinkansen. Approximately 10 minutes from Ichinoseki to Hiraizumi Station by JR Tohoku Line.



### ③ Remains of Muryoko-in

Muryoko-in was built by Fujiwara no Kiyohira in the late twelfth century. The temple itself has been destroyed by fire, and only cornerstones and the remains of the pond can still be found.



### ④ Motsu-ji

The origins of Motsu-ji are said to date back to the ninth century. Fujiwara no Motohira and Hidehira built many structures, including temples and gates. The photo shows the main hall of Motsu-ji.



### ⑤ Remains of Kanjizaio-in

Kanjizaio-in is said to have been built by Motohira’s wife, but was burned to the ground during a war in 1573. The photo shows a restored garden.