

Kencho-ji, the First of Kamakura's Five Great Zen Temples "Zen & Kenchin Program" ~Eat Zen Experience~ Zen Experience and Special Temple Visit Program Through Kenchin Soup, Born in a Zen Temple

Kanagawa/Kamakura Area

This mindfulness and gastronomy program draws on the Zen culture of Kencho-ji, a historic temple ranked first among Kamakura's Five Great Zen Temples, and Kenchin soup, a traditional dish that originated at the temple. Rather than simply "experiencing" Zen through food, the program invites participants to savor and understand the spirit of Zen.



The Experience

Founded in 1253, Kencho-ji is **Japan's first authentic Zen training monastery** and serves as the head temple of the Rinzai sect's Kencho-ji branch, ranking first among the Kamakura Gozan (Five Great Zen Temples of Kamakura). Even today, as a place of ascetic training where the Zen spirit is passed down, it is not merely a historical site, but a living sanctuary where Zen culture continues to thrive. Combining a guided tour of the grounds by a Kencho-ji monk and a Zazen meditation session, this rare experience follows the theme of "Learning and Savoring Zen." Through eating "Kenchin soup", participants can taste, learn about, and experience both the spirit and culture of Zen. As Japan's first authentic Zen training monastery, Kencho-ji offers a truly rare program that seamlessly combines a Zen experience, original Kenchin soup, and a special temple visit.

※"Kenchin soup" is a traditional Buddhist vegetarian (shojin ryori) dish said to have originated at Kencho-ji, and this vegetable-based culinary culture has been widely passed down throughout Japan to this day. In recent years, interest in Sustainable Food and Mindful Eating has been growing worldwide. The opportunity to experience shojin ryori (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine)—the very root of these concepts—at its birthplace, Kencho-ji, is a truly unique draw exclusive to "Kanagawa".

Sales Points

Experience viewing historic architecture alongside mindfulness and gastronomy programs at Kencho-ji, the top-ranked of Kamakura's Five Great Zen Temples and considered the birthplace of Zen in Japan. Rather than a typical sightseeing and dining tour of Kamakura, this offer allows you to experience authentic local culture unique to the area, featuring regional food stories and deeply enriching spiritual experiences. Furthermore, set in the serene and dignified atmosphere of Kita-Kamakura and Kencho-ji Temple, this experience offers the quiet spirituality and authentic essence of Kamakura away from the crowded tourist hotspots.

General Information

■Contact: Kanagawa DMO
■Business Hours: 9:00–17:00
■Website: <https://www.kanagawa-kankou.or.jp/>
■Phone: 045-681-0007
■Email: product@kanagawa-kankou.or.jp

Tour Types

International Conferences & Corporate Incentives

Target

Culture-Oriented, Authenticity-Minded, International VIPs

Price (Tax Included)

Please inquire.

Includes

Special Temple Visit Program
 • Temple Grounds Guided Tour by a Monk
 ※Interpretation is required for languages other than English.
 • Zazen, Kenchin Soup Set, and Buddhist Sermon
 • Venue rental, event planning and preparation fee, and temple visit souvenir
 • Attendant staff fee
 ※An additional admission fee applies for access to the Sanmon Gate.
 Climbing the Sanmon Gate (Sanmon Torou) refers to ascending to the second floor (upper story) to participate in a special viewing of the Buddhist statues enshrined there.
 This is a special viewing experience that is strictly off-limits to the general public.

Meeting Point

Kencho-ji Parking Lot: 2-7-4 Jomyoji, Kamakura City

Access

A 15-mins. walk from JR Kita-Kamakura Sta. or 5 mins. by Enoden Bus bound for Kamakura (get off at "Kenchoji-mae")

Reservation Period

From 6 months to 20 days prior

Reservation Accepted

Available year-round, excluding Obon, Higan, the New Year period, and other festival dates (Please consult with us in advance)

Duration

90 mins ※120 mins with Sanmon Gate visit

Group Size

20 to 40 people (For groups of more than 40, please consult with us)

Private Tours

The temple grounds cannot be exclusively reserved. Only the venue where the kenchin soup meal is held can be reserved exclusively.

Languages

☑English ☐Chinese ☐Korean ☐Others:

Guide Provided

Available

[Kencho-ji Temple: Special Visit Program Overview]

Experience a unique mindful and gastronomic program at Kencho-ji Temple, the first-ranked of Kamakura's Five Great Zen Temples and widely regarded as the birthplace of Zen in Japan. More than just a standard sightseeing tour or meal, this program offers an authentic cultural experience unique to Kamakura—combining the rich narrative behind the local culinary heritage with a deeply fulfilling spiritual journey.

Kencho-ji Temple is the first-ranked of Kamakura's Five Great Zen Temples and the head temple of the Rinza sect's Kencho-ji branch. The temple grounds are designated as a National Historic Site.



At the Hojo (Ryuoden Hall)



Special Zen Meditation Experience

Zazen is said to mean sitting quietly in deep reflection—the practice undertaken to reach the state of enlightenment achieved by Shakyamuni Buddha.. To put it simply, it means finding the pure heart and true self that each of us naturally possesses.



1 Sanmon Gate (Important Cultural Property of Japan)

Greeting at Somon Gate.
Guided Temple Tour Begins with a Monk.



2 Temple Bell (National Treasure)



Boasting the largest scale in eastern Japan, it is an important structure that represents the culmination of Kencho-ji's early modern temple complex reconstruction. The lower level's open-air structure conveys a sense of openness, paired with a bold, powerful design.

3 Hatto (Dharma Hall) (National Important Cultural Property)



Special Buddhist Sermon

In the past, the entire Kencho-ji temple served as a training monastery, where all the monks would gather in this Dharma Hall (Hatto) to listen to the head priest's sermon. It is also said to be the largest Dharma Hall in the Kanto region.

4 Hojo (Ryuoden Hall)



Behind the Dharma Hall stands the Karamon Gate, and beyond it lies the Hojo, also known as the Ryuoden Hall. Behind the Hojo lies a garden featuring a pond shaped like the kanji character for "heart" (心), which is why it is called Shinji-ike (Heart-shaped Pond).

Special Viewing to Mount Sanmon Gate: Additional Admission Fee Required



Access to the upper level of the Sanmon Gate is normally closed to the public. Entry is strictly prohibited under standard visits and is only accessible during "Special Viewings."

Enshrined on the upper story (the top of the gate) are statues of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Sixteen Arhats, and the Five Hundred Arhats (enlightened practitioners). Visitors ascending the gate can pay their respects to these figures.

Used as a special dining room

5 Okyuro (1st Floor) or Tokugetsurou (2nd Floor)



"Tokugetsu" means to fully enjoy the view and ambiance of the moon, and it refers to a highly precious, spacious hall that can also be used for banquets.

A special culinary experience featuring Kenchin soup — a dish originating from Kencho-ji, born from the spirit of sustainability.



The name "Kenchin soup" is said to have derived from "Kencho soup," a dish created by Rankei Doryu, the founding abbot of Kencho-ji, to avoid wasting vegetable skins and scraps (though theories vary). It is a true pioneer of sustainable food.

It is a meal that can also be served as a vegan option.

Lunch arrangement is also available.

Lunch can be separately arranged upon request (budget flexible).

