

# ASAKUSA KANNON

The Sensōji Temple Tokyo, Japan

## 浅草寺



*Sensōji from an Edo period (1603—1867)  
wood block print by Hiroshige*

### MAJOR ANNUAL CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS OF THE TEMPLE

- December 31 ~ January 1  
Shushō-e (New Year's ceremony)
- February 3  
Setsubun-e (The bean-scattering ceremony)
- March 18  
Kannon-Jigen-e (The memorial day of Kannon's appearance)
- April 8  
Hana Matsuri (The Buddha's birthday)  
The middle of May Saturday and Sunday  
The festival of the Asakusa Jinja Shrine
- June 18  
Yūji-Utsui Kaji-e (The ceremony of sprinkling sacred water on visitors with a willow twig.)
- July 9 and 10  
Shiman-vokusen-nichi (Kannon's most benevolent days.)
- August 15  
Tōrō Kuyō-e (The lantern festival)
- October 18  
Kiku Kuyō-e (The ceremony of offering chrysanthemums to Kannon.)
- November 15  
Shichi-go-san (The festival for children of 3, 5 and 7 years of age)
- December 17 and 18  
Toshi-no-ichi (The year-end market)
- December 31  
Joya no Kane (The watch-night bell on New Year's Eve at the Benten-yama Belfry.)

#### Kinryū-no-mai (The Golden Dragon Dance)

It is a postwar revival of an ancient performance mentioned in a temple's archive. In celebration of the completion of the present Main Hall, the dance was performed in public, and since then it has become a major attraction of the temple's festivals on March 18 and October 18.

#### Shirasagi-no-mai (The White Crane Dance)

A graceful dance performed on November 3, portraying an ancient agrarian life around the temple in its early history. Girls in white bird costumes dance to slow music, depicting herons eating harmful worms.

### SOCIAL WORK OF THE TEMPLE

Like Christian societies, the temple has established several institutions near the Main Hall. The Sensōji Hospital was founded in 1910, first as an aid station to victims of a severe flood, which hit the Asakusa area in 19th century. It has developed now into a general hospital. The Sensōji Kindergarten, which was opened in 1910, has 450 kindergarten children under the supe-



Golden Dragon Dance



White Crane Dance

rintendence of the Chief Abbot.

The Sensōji Welfare Institution was established for giving advices, free of charge, by specialists (such as for legal troubles by lawyers) on various problems of any people in 1958. Because the idea of the Kannon is to relieve all the people from their sufferings. The Institution also hold educational chairs for local residents. And it issues a PR pamphlet quarterly.



Kaminarimon Gate

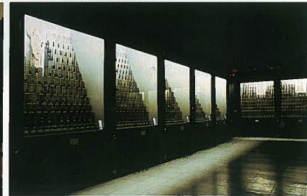
Pagoda



Golden globe for holding Buddha's ashes



Altar at the base of the pagoda



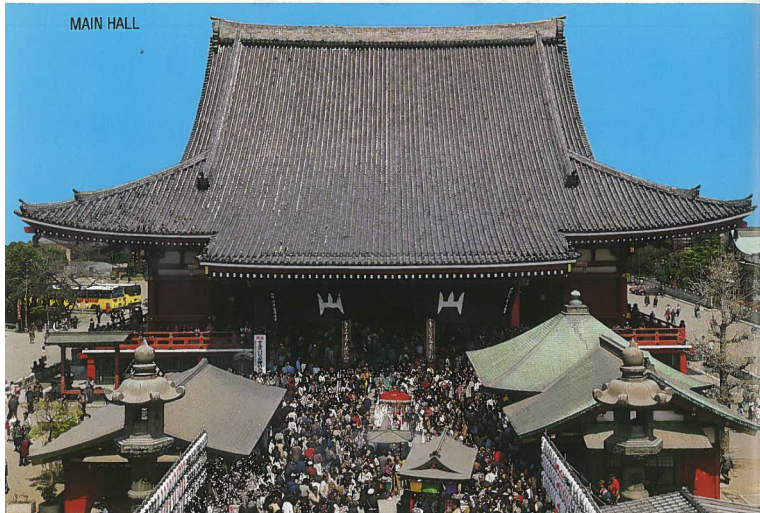
100 sacred compartments in the pagoda, with a Kannon statue and 100 posthumous nameplates in each for perpetual prayers

Asakusa Kannon, of which the official name is Sensoji, is dedicated to the bodhisattva Kannon, a popular Buddhist god. According to a legend, the statue of Kannon was found in the Sumida River in 628 by two fishermen, the brothers Hinokuma Hamanari and Hinokuma Takenari. Hajino Nakatomo, the headman of their village, recognized the statue's sanctity and enshrined the statue by remaking his own house into a small temple in this place so that the villagers could worship the god. The blessings of Kannon gradually got a higher reputation throughout and people from afar and there flocked to pray the god. After numerous fires, the temple had been rebuilt and enlarged many times. During the Kamakura period (1188—1333) it became the center of worship for Kannon's so many ardent devotees. Since then Asakusa Kannon had been worshipped by many devout believers including feudal military leaders such as shoguns and samurai.

They protected the temple and donated various privileges.

Particularly, in the 17th century Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu of the Edo shogunate donated a splendid main hall and other buildings. In the Edo period (1603—1868) and throughout the Modern ages of Japan Asakusa has been the site where the general public has come together.

The main hall, which had weathered the three centuries and was specified as a national treasure, was unfortunately lost in an air raid in 1945, as were the five-storied pagoda and Hozomon gate. After the World War II numerous worshippers expressed their fervent wish to have the main hall rebuilt in its former grandeur and contributed money for the reconstruction. The present Main Hall completed in 1958 is the fruit of their wishes and prayers. Though it is made of ferroconcrete, it has copied the predecessor in the Edo period to the details. But



MAIN HALL

only the Nitemmon Gate in the temple precinct remains from the Edo period. Asakusa Kannon is one of the most famous centers for Kannon worship in Japan as before. Millions of visitors come every month to pray for Kannon's blessings for both themselves and their families and give thanks for the patronage by the god. Kannon's statue is worshipped in many families in Japan just as the Virgin Mother Mary in the Western countries. The face of Kannon is often depicted as that of a gentle and noble lady. According to Buddhist teaching, Kannon is the god of compassion and has great

power to release human beings from all kind of sufferings. Kannon also has a great deal of power to purify people and help them obtain true happiness. A sutra says: "As soon as people's cries of agony reach Kannon, The bodhisattva takes pity on them and saves them from the tortures of the Hell. If people offer sincere prayers to Kannon, even fire cannot burn them, and water cannot drown them." In the Main Hall various Buddhist services are observed every day, offering prayers to Kannon for the protection of people, the nation and the world.