

ANOTHER SENDAI

A free journey beyond the everyday city

¥0 FREE ENGLISH

Fourth Issue!

Each issue is a journey to another Sendai, places that are all too easy to pass by without noticing. This publication is a collaboration between Hariu Communications and the *Sendai Motions* online magazine.

[Edition Theme] *Sendai's Shangri-La*

Tucked away in the forested mountains of western Sendai lies the small community of Jogi. Its dominant manmade feature is Jogi Nyorai Saihoji, a Buddhist temple founded surreptitiously over 800 years ago by members of the Heike clan. For generations its location was kept secret, a refuge of the fallen clan.

Jogi Nyorai Saihoji

A hidden temple, the refuge of a fallen clan

The Jogi Nyorai Saihoji temple enshrines a scroll of the Amida Buddha once owned and venerated by Heike clan lord Shigemori Taira. On his deathbed, Lord Shigemori entrusted the scroll to his faithful warrior Taira no Sadayoshi. When the clan met decisive defeat at the hands of the rival Genji clan in the twelfth century, the Heike fled in all directions. Sadayoshi fled north with the scroll, eventually settling in the mountains of what is now Miyagi Prefecture. He changed his name to "Jogi" and dedicated the rest of his life to praying for peace and the salvation of his fallen clan. After Jogi's death, his disciples established a small temple at his gravesite to enshrine the scroll. This was the beginning of Jogi Nyorai Saihoji. Throughout this time the area remained clandestine, as the Heike clan was deemed outcast and sought to hide its settlements from the world.

The temple didn't rise to prominence until 500 or so years later, after Date Masamune established Sendai as the seat of his domain in 1600. Folk residing in the new castle town began to hear legends of a temple far to the west that granted worldly benefits to the faithful.

Saihoji has maintained that reputation ever since, with roughly 70,000 visitors coming to pray each year. Even in this modern age of convenience, people still make the trip out to this secluded location for prayer—an act of faith that stands testament to the reverence people hold for this temple.



Enjoy a cup of *matcha* or try *shakyo*

Reverend Kogi Oeda, the current chief priest of Saihoji, speaks English well thanks to the six years he spent at a temple in Hawaii. He thinks that the journey itself has a lot to do with people's attitude toward prayer and time spent at Saihoji. "I think people feel more grateful because it's so far," says Oeda. "Especially a long time ago, because the only way was to walk."

What does Reverend Oeda think of people coming to pray for worldly benefits rather than something more...enlightened? "That's life. That's a natural thing, as a human being. For me too,"

he chuckles. "Before I had a wife and children, before I got married, I prayed every day [for those things]."

Saihoji has become known as a sightseeing spot only recently, within the last 20 years or so. Reverend Oeda sees this new kind of interest as a good thing. He invites visitors to stop in for a cup of *matcha* at the temple's teahouse or participate in *shakyo*, the hand-copying of a Buddhist sutra. It is his hope that the peace and well-being visitors feel at Saihoji will inspire them to come again and again.



Jogi Nyorai Saihoji

定義如来 西方寺

Joge 1, Okura, Aoba, Sendai, Miyagi

Hours: 7:00-16:30

Closed days: none

Tel: 022-393-2011

URL: <https://jogi.jp>

Access

80 minutes by bus from Sendai Station. From Sendai Station West Exit Bus Stop #10, board a bus bound for Jogi (定義). Alight at Jogi, the final stop.



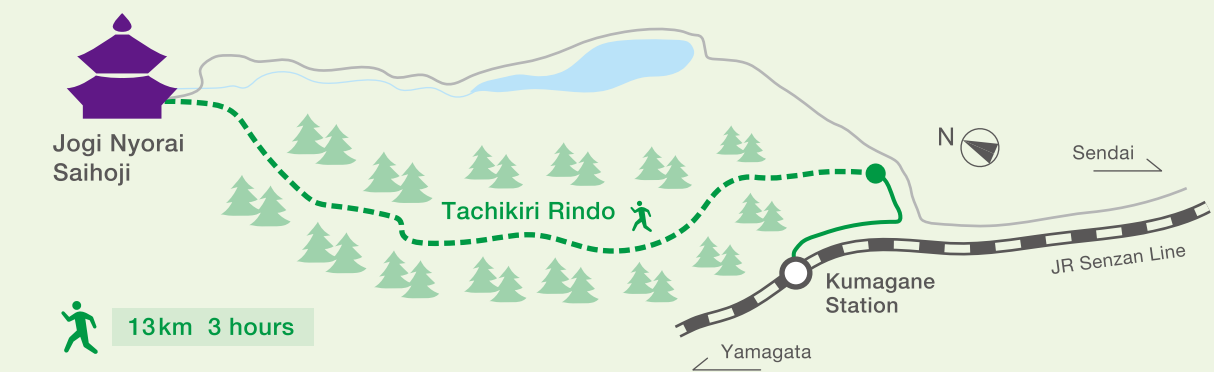
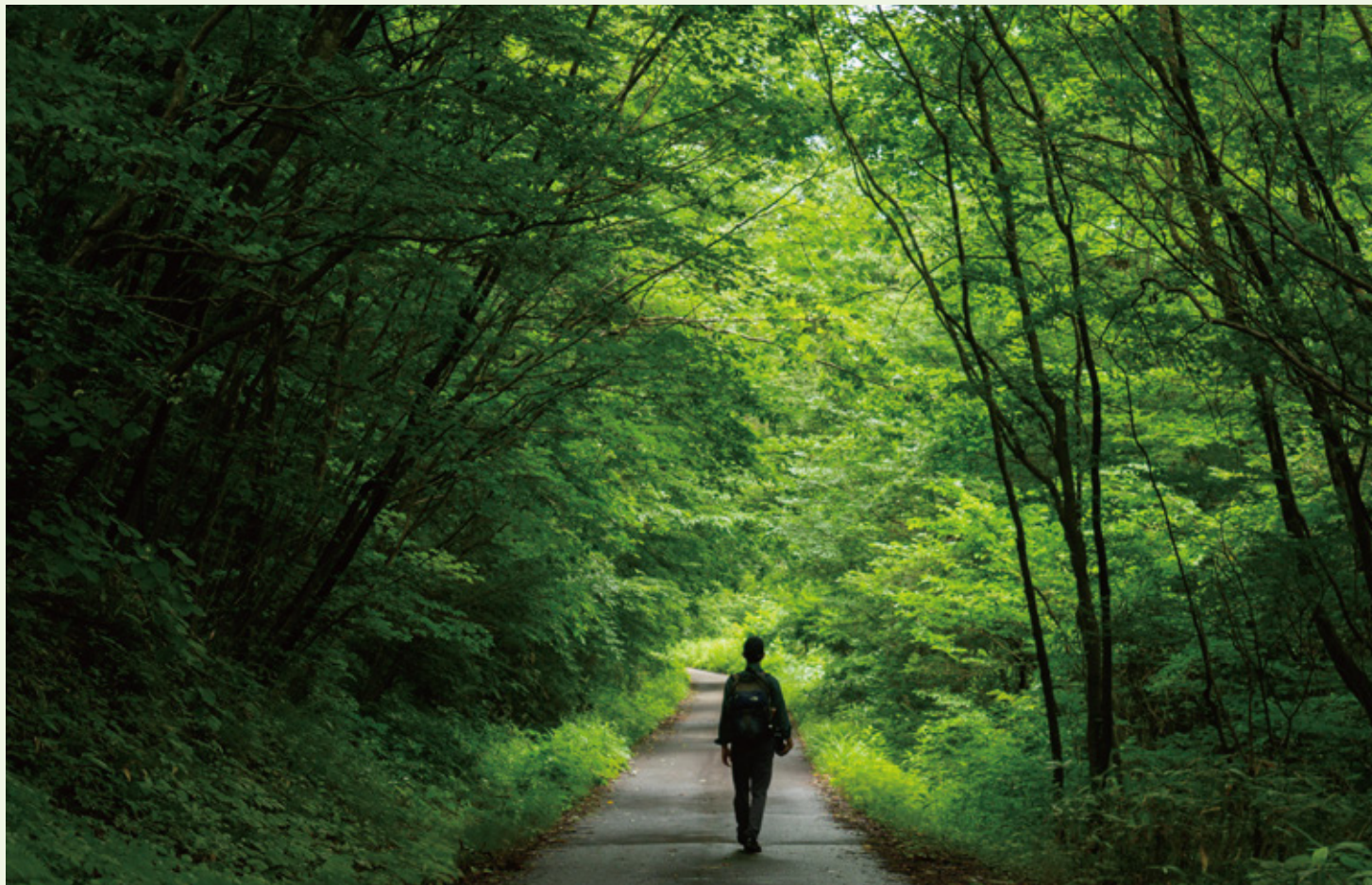


Walking the Tachikiri Rindo

A route used by the Heike to flee north

Approaching Jogi the traditional way, on foot along a historical route, can make the journey there even more special. A historic route called the Tachikiri Rindo (太刀切林道) leads to Saihoji from the south. The Tachikiri Rindo, meaning "forest path cut with a sword," is a section of one of the once-clandestine routes used by the Heike clan to access the Jogi area. In fact, it is presumed this was the route taken by Taira no Sadayoshi in the twelfth century to carry the Amida Buddha scroll to safety when he fled north after the Heike clan's defeat.

The Tachikiri Rindo has been paved for use as a road but is almost never used by cars, making it a pleasant and exceedingly accessible route for trekking, running, or cycling. The area remains undeveloped, a narrow, peaceful road through the woods. With no grand sights along the path, one's attention is drawn towards humble natural charms all too often overlooked in everyday life. Stay mindful and you'll spot minor natural wonders such as unusual plants, tiny frogs no larger than a thumbnail, and wild monkeys carousing in the treetops.



太刀切林道 The Tachikiri Rindo is located between Kumagane Station and Jogi Nyorai Saihoji. The road itself isn't labeled on Google Maps, but the Google Maps walking directions from Kumagane Station to Saihoji will take you along it anyway. Following the Google Maps walking directions, the first two-thirds of the walk are along a scenic country road. Eventually, you'll come to a sign that says "定義如来入口 4.4 km". Next to it, you'll find a small post that says "起点太刀切定義線" marking the start of the Tachikiri Rindo. Turn right here, as Google Maps and the sign suggest, and you'll be on the Tachikiri Rindo for the rest of the walk.

Jogi Monzen Street Food

A centuries-old street food tradition

In the days before cars, the pilgrimage to Jogi could be summed up in the expression "Goza shotte Jogi-mairi," meaning that one going to pray at Jogi must pack a mat to sleep on because the trek was so long. The Monzen ("in front of the temple gate") area served hungry pilgrims food after their long journey. Though the journey is no longer so arduous, the Monzen area is still known for its delicious street food. *Sankaku Jogi aburage* (三角定義あぶらげ) is certainly the most famous: triangular chunks of tofu deep-fried until golden-crisp on the outside with a toothsome interior. It's popular with the Saihoji monks as well, who eat it nearly every day.

Jogi *yakimeshi* (やきめし) and *miso oden* (みそおでん) are among the other popular street foods here. The *yakimeshi* is a portable affair: a grilled rice ball slathered in a salty-sweet miso paste, rewarding high-carb nourishment for hungry trekkers. The konnyaku-based miso oden, conversely, is nearly calorie-free: the konnyaku itself contains fewer than ten calories per serving, with the savory miso sauce it's slathered in contributing a handful more. In spite of its low-cal profile, konnyaku is no modern fad-diet food. It has been prized in Japan for centuries as a medicinal food and digestive aid, thanks in a large part to its high glucomannan content.



Sankaku Jogi aburage



Jogi yakimeshi and miso oden