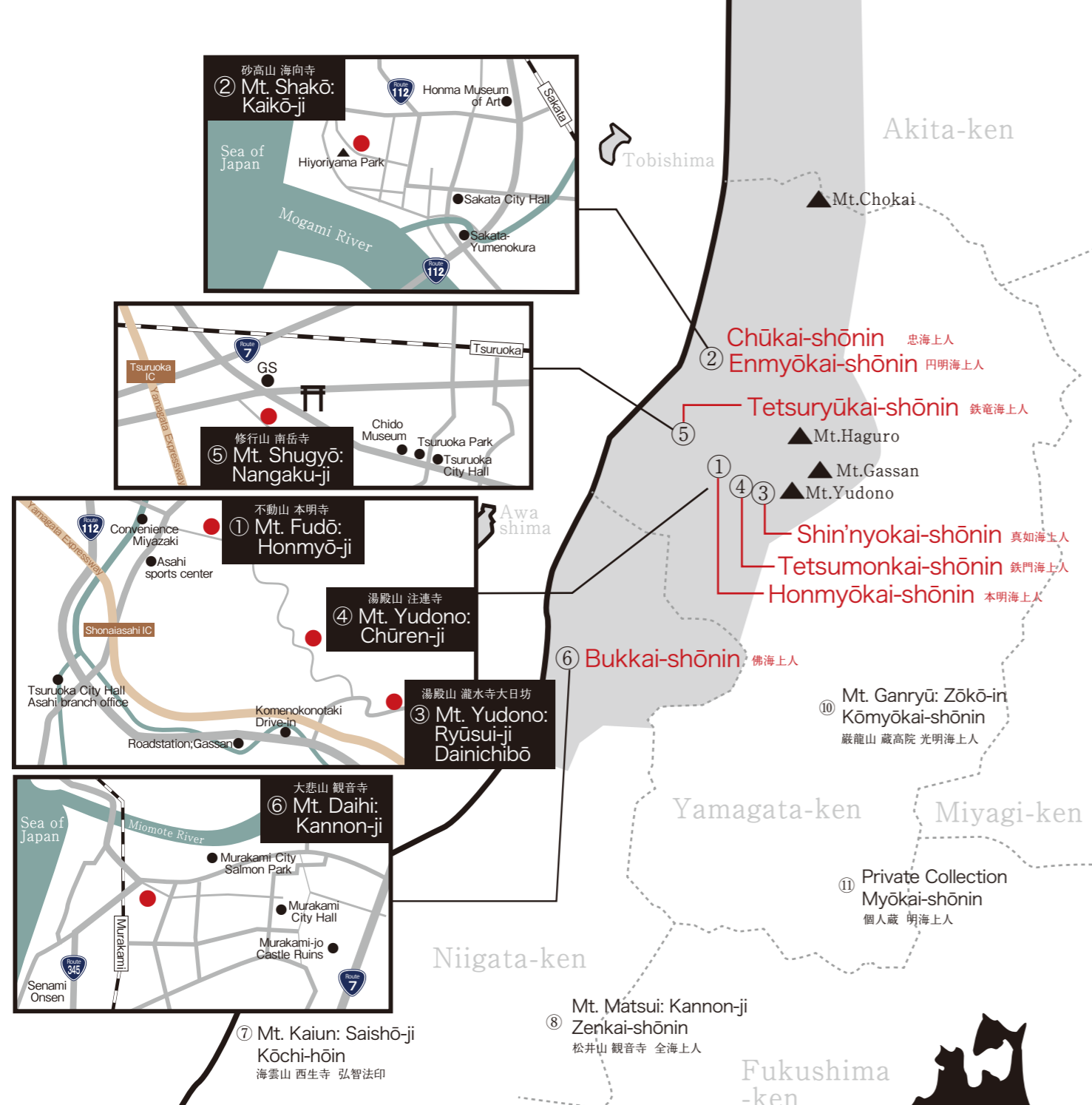


# Sacred Mysteries of the Uetsu Holy Land

## Discovering Living Buddha

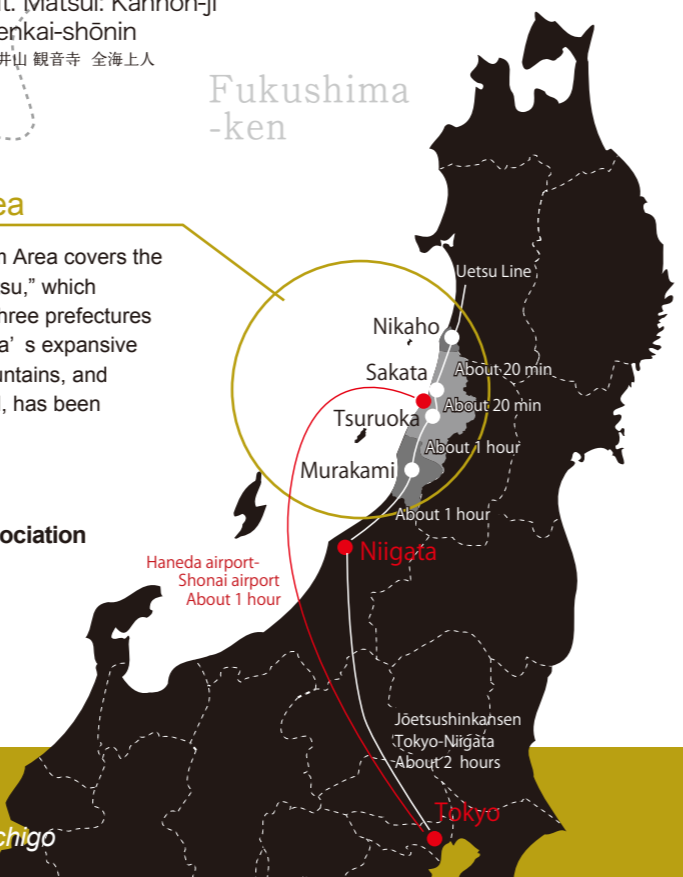


### The Sea of Japan Kira-kira Uetsu Tourism Area

The Sea of Japan Kira-kira Uetsu Tourism Area covers the picturesque coastal region known as "Uetsu," which includes ten municipalities spanning the three prefectures of Akita, Yamagata, and Niigata. This area's expansive environment includes rivers, the sea, mountains, and villages, and its culture, rooted in the land, has been woven over the course of ages.

#### The Sea of Japan Kira-kira Uetsu Tourism Area Promotion Association (Shonai Visitors Association)

19-1 Sodehigashi, Yokoyama, Mikawa-machi, HigashiTagawa-gun, Yamagata-ken, 997-1392 ☎0235-68-2511  
<http://www.mokkedano.net/kirakira/english/index.html>



### Living Buddha

Sokushinbutsu Living Buddha were Buddhist monks who sealed themselves beneath the earth as an offering to save the masses who were suffering from famine and the plague. The would-be Living Buddha secluded themselves in the mountains for 1000 to 5000 days, forgoing the staple cereals (rice, wheat, beans, and millet), and surviving on only mountain plants and seeds in order to strip their bodies of fat. When death drew near, they would climb into a stone room or underground hole and ring a bell while chanting the name of Amida Buddha. Three years and three months after the bell stopped ringing the body would be recovered, dried with the greatest care, and enshrined as a Living Buddha.

There are over a dozen Living Buddha in Japan, and seven of them are enshrined in six temples within the Sea of Japan Kira-kira Uetsu tourism area.

Stand before the holy seven,  
who gave their bodies in offering to save the people  
from their suffering evermore

Map①

本明海上人  
Honmyōkai-shōnin

Honmyōkai-shōnin was born in 1623 to Tokūemon Saitō: a vassal of the daimyō Tadakatsu Sakai, who at that time ruled the Shōnai domain. Honmyōkai came to serve Sakai in turn, but the lord was stricken with a terrible illness; so, in his lord's place, Honmyōkai traveled to Sen'ninzawa on Mt. Yudono and secluded himself to pray. He became spiritually attuned with the spiritual, and Sakai's illness was healed. This experience led Honmyōkai to leave his post in 1661 at the age of 40. He entered the mountains for 4000 days, eating only seeds and mountain plants. In 1669, he underwent strict ascetic training at Higashi-iwamoto, and in 1673 erected the main hall and Sokushin Hall at Honmyō-ji. He sealed himself beneath the earth and became a Living Buddha in 1683, and Honmyō-ji became the new official temple of the Sakai daimyō family.

不動山 本明寺  
Mt. Fudō: Honmyō-ji



Uchino-388 Higashiiwamoto, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata-ken ☎0235-53-2269

Free entry  
Please make a reservation before visiting

Map②

忠海上人  
Chūkai-shōnin

Chūkai-shōnin was born in 1697 in Tori-machi—now part of Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture—to the Togashi samurai family. In 1746, He caused Mt. Shakō's spiritual revival as head priest of Kaikō-ji. At age 50 he chose to follow the unforgiving path of the ascetic, including a restrictive diet of only seeds and grasses, in order to grant the wishes of the people and save them from suffering. He interred himself on February 21st, 1755 and became a Living Buddha.

円明海上人  
Enmyōkai-shōnin

Enmyōkai-shōnin was born to Rokubē Satō in Kaneai, Sakae-mura (present-day Shōnai-machi) in Yamagata's Higashi-tagawa district in 1767. He served as Kaikō-ji's 9th head priest, and at 50 resolved to become a Living Buddha. He secluded himself at Sen'ninzawa on Mt. Yudono and followed an austere ascetic diet that involved consuming no grains or legumes. On August 5th, 1822, he sealed himself below ground and became a "living Buddha." Kaikō-ji is the only temple in Japan where two Living Buddha are enshrined.

砂高山 海向寺  
Mt. Shakō: Kaikō-ji



2-Chome 7-12 Hiyoshichō, Sakata-shi, Yamagata-ken ☎0234-22-4264  
Hours: 9:00–17:00 (Apr. through Oct.) 9:00–16:00 (Nov. through Mar.)  
Closed on: Tuesdays (except public holidays); Jan. 1st through 3rd  
Entrance fee: ¥400 for adults, ¥200 for elementary/middle school students (discounts available for groups of 20 or more)

Map③

真如海上人  
Shin'nyokai-shōnin

Shin'nyokai-shōnin was born the eldest son of a farming family in Yamagata Prefecture, in what was then Asahi-mura's Echuyama area. He had an innate purity of character, and was devoted to Buddhism from an early age. He wished to spend his life making the world into a true land of Buddha, free of inequity. Shin'nyokai-shōnin worshipped the holy spirit of Mt. Yudono, and worked out of Ryūsui-ji Dainichibō temple on the mountain. Many honored him as a "living bodhisattva" during his lifetime as a paragon of virtue: he endeavored to spread Buddhist teachings to the four corners, built temples, demonstrated boundless compassion, and worked toward the welfare of all. For 70 long years, he endured a variety of harsh ascetic practices; finally, at 96 years of age, he enclosed himself underground and became a Living Buddha.

湯殿山 瀧水寺大日坊  
Mt. Yudono: Ryūsui-ji Dainichibō



Nyūdō-11 Ōami, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata-ken ☎0235-54-6301  
Entrance fee: ¥500 for adults ¥450 per person for groups (of 30+ visitors) ¥400 for middle school students; ¥300 for elementary school students  
Hours: 8:00–17:00 (last entry at 16:30)

Map④

鉄門海上人  
Tetsumonkai-shōnin

Tetsumonkai-shōnin, born in Yamagata Prefecture's Tsuruoka City in 1759, left home at 21 to undergo ascetic training at Sen'ninzawa on Mt. Yudono. He then built a new road in Kamosaka, where the people had suffered a series of hardships. While in Edo, where a plague of eye disease ran rampant, he offered his left eye to the dragon god of the Sumida River in prayer. For this deed, he came to be called "Saint Tetsumonkai of the Blessed Eye." His missionary work took place primarily in the Shōnai region, but also from the Kanto region up through Hokkaidō, and he gathered a great many followers. Stone statues in his likeness are found far and wide, paying homage to him as a "god of pilgrims." In 1829, after a lifetime of guiding people on the path to salvation, Tetsumonkai-shōnin became a Living Buddha at the age of 71.

湯殿山 注連寺  
Mt. Yudono: Chūren-ji



Nakadai-92-1 Ōami, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata-ken ☎0235-54-6536  
Entrance fee: 500 for adults, ¥400 for elementary/middle school students ¥300 for children  
Hours: 9:00–17:00 May through Oct. 10:00–16:00 Nov. through Apr.

Map⑤

鉄竜海上人  
Tetsuryūkai-shōnin

Born in Akita Prefecture's Senboku-machi (now Daisen City) to the Shindō family in 1819, Tetsuryūkai-shōnin started out at Nangaku-ji—a branch temple of Mt. Yudono's Chūren-ji. He then underwent ascetic training at Chūren-ji; however, when Nangaku-ji was lost to a fire during the period of 1848 to 1854, he decided to return and rebuild it. He also took up and completed the difficult construction project in Kamosaka that his teacher, Tetsumonkai-shōnin, had begun. He committed to becoming a Living Buddha at the age of 55, and fulfilled his 1000-day fast and austere training in isolation at Mt. Yudono's Sen'ninzawa. He entombed himself in 1881, at the age of 62. Nangaku-ji also has a hall enshrining Toshie Osanami, whose psychic powers were recognized by the high court while at the temple. Miraculously, when the temple burned in the Shōwa era, only the main altar and Living Buddha survived.

修行山 南岳寺  
Mt. Shugyō: Nangaku-ji



3-6 Sunadamachi, Tsuruoka-shi, Yamagata-ken ☎0235-23-5054  
Hours: 8:30–16:00  
Closed on: Jan. 2nd, May 13th  
Entrance fee: ¥400 for adults ¥200 for children

Map⑥

佛海上人  
Bukkai-shōnin

Bukkai-shōnin was born the eldest son of the Kondo family on May 9th, 1828, in the Ara-machi area of Niigata Prefecture's Murakami City. He joined Chūren-ji on Mt. Yudono at the age of 18, and also trained at Honmyō-ji. Over the course of 15 years, he continued to practice asceticism at Sen'ninzawa, in addition to undergoing training at Mt. Amagi in Izu and Kaikō-ji in Sakata. At the age of 35, he began a strict plant-based diet eschewing the staple grains; in 1867, at 37, he became the head priest of Honmyō-ji. He returned to Murakami in 1874 to serve at Kannon-ji. In May 1888, he became head priest of Chūren-ji, which had burned to the ground, and restored the temple. Afterward, he again returned to his hometown. In 1903, at age 76, he interred himself and, after 41 years of harsh training, became Japan's last Living Buddha.

大悲山 観音寺  
Mt. Daihi: Kannon-ji



15-28 Sakanamachi, Murakami-shi, Niigata-ken ☎0254-52-4707  
Hours: 8:30–17:00  
Free entry

More Living Buddha are enshrined in temples around the Sea of Japan Kira-kira Uetsu tourism area.

- 【Map⑦】 海雲山 西生寺 弘智法印 Mt. Kaiun: Saishō-ji Kōchi-hōin 8996 Teradomarinozumi, Nagaoka-shi, Niigata-ken ☎0258-75-3441  
【Map⑧】 松井山 観音寺 全海上人 Mt. Matsui: Kannon-ji Zenkai-shōnin 1779 Toyomi-kou, Aga-machi, Higashikanbara-gun, Niigata-ken ☎0254-52-2228 (Chōraku-ji) \*Viewing permitted only on July 8th  
【Map⑨】 妙廣山 真珠院 秀快上人 Mt. Myōkō: Shinju-in Shūkai-shōnin 502 Nishinagatori-kou, Kashiwazaki-shi, Niigata-ken ☎0257-25-3301

- 【Map⑩】 蔵龍山 蔵高院 光明海上人 Mt. Ganryū: Zōkō-in Kōmyōkai-shōnin 544-1 Kurogamo, Shirataka-machi, Nishiokitama-gun, Yamagata-ken ☎0238-85-1131  
【Map⑪】 個人蔵 明海上人 Private Collection Myōkai-shōnin Yanazawa, Yonezawa, Yamagata-ken ☎090-7069-8688