

Buddha Statue - Japan - Kamakura



Rising with a serene seated posture in the open-air courtyard of Kotoku-in Temple in Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, the Kamakura Daibutsu is not just a statue; it is the embodiment of eight hundred years of silence, the depth of Buddhist faith, and the pinnacle of Japanese art. Standing 13.35 meters tall and weighing approximately 93 tons, it is the second-largest Japanese statue, and it was originally housed inside a temple building. However, the temple structure was destroyed by typhoons in the 14th and 15th centuries and a tsunami triggered by the Nankai earthquake in 1498; since then, the Daibutsu has continued to sit in the open air, accepting the sky as its ceiling and the mountains as its walls.

Who is Buddha? Information About the Kamakura Statue

The Kamakura Daibutsu depicts Amida Buddha, the central figure of Pure Land Buddhism and the Buddha of Infinite Light. Amida Buddha holds a deep place in the world of faith as a sacred being who mediates the salvation of all living things and symbolizes compassion and light. Construction of the statue began in 1252 during the Kamakura period; a wooden Buddha statue completed in 1243 existed prior to construction, but that statue was destroyed in a storm in 1247. The current bronze Buddha statue is the product of a massive project made possible by the Buddhist monk Jōko collecting donations across the country. The calmness on his face, the posture of the hands in the meditation mudra, and the overall balance of the figure give the viewer a sense of deep inner peace and surrender. The interior of the statue is open to visitors, and for a small donation, it is possible to examine the traces of the bronze casting technique from the inside.

Artistic Features and Sculptor of the Statue

The identity of the original designer of the Kamakura Daibutsu is not definitively stated in historical records. However, academic research suggests that the work was cast by Ono Goroemon or Tanji Hisatomo, and stylistic analyses reveal the strong influence of the Chinese Buddhist sculpture tradition of the Song Dynasty and the Kei School, the leading school in Japan at the time. The Kei School, with masters such as Unkei, Kaikei, and Tankei, formed the most influential sculpture tradition of the Kamakura period. The statue was produced by joining multiple bronze pieces together, and traces of gold gilding can still be discerned near the ears. Its neck was reinforced in 1960-61, and special measures were taken for earthquake safety. Registered as a National Treasure of Japan, this work is also among the proposed sites for Kamakura's inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

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