

TITLE: Mt. Benten (Bentendake)

Bentendake, or Mt. Benten, is one of the sacred peaks that rise around the Koyasan plateau like the petals of a lotus flower. The Shinto shrine on the summit of Mt. Benten venerates the goddess Benzaiten, a Japanese deity derived from the Hindu goddess Saraswati. Associated with and worshipped by both the Shinto and Buddhist faiths, Benzaiten is the patron goddess of everything that flows, including music, water, time, speech, and wisdom. The goddess is believed to protect the springs of water that flow to, and supply, this sacred plateau.

In addition to the shrine atop Mt. Benten, six smaller shrines to Benzaiten stand at various locations on Koyasan.

According to the *Kii Shoku Fudoki*, an ancient record of the area roughly corresponding to present-day Wakayama Prefecture, Kobo Daishi, also known as Kukai (774–835), traveled to Nara (then known as Yamato) around the time he founded Koyasan, to invite the goddess Benzaiten to protect this new center of Buddhist teaching and worship. The goddess agreed and returned to Koyasan with Kobo Daishi, placing a portion of her essence into an enchanted pearl that Kobo Daishi buried in the ground at the summit of Mt. Benten. Since that time, the goddess has been an important protector and patroness of Koyasan.