

Tennenji Temple

You're standing in front of Tennenji Temple, one of the best examples of the unique religious heritage of the area. This is a Buddhist temple that is literally built into the face of a cliff and shares a wall with the neighboring Shinto shrine. You can tell that the building on the right is the shrine because it has a *torii* gate at the entrance. The Temple Lecture Hall on the left was once a center for ascetic training by Buddhist monks who were searching for enlightenment, and the training would include climbing the trails that crisscross the rugged hills behind the shrine.

If you'd like to experience something of their strict regimen, you can climb the steep trail that leads to the ridge above the temple. If you'd just like a glimpse of what they went through, look up to your right at the ridge and you can see the arch of a small stone bridge that crosses a narrow chasm between two rocky peaks. We also recommend that you cross to the bridge in front of the shrine, to view the superb stone carving of a Buddhist deity on the face of a large boulder in the middle of the river.

Shujo Oni-e

Tennenji Temple is the site of a rare and fascinating festival showcasing the coexistence of the Buddhist religion and ancient mountain worship. The event, which is held in February each year, begins with conch trumpets calling on men to purify themselves in the frigid waters of the river just across the road. Fire plays a big part in the festival, with the men jousting outside with huge lit torches before the events move indoors.

After ritual dances and offerings, a pair of masked *oni*, the ogres of ancient Japan, join in a whirling, leaping dance, wielding blazing torches over an ecstatic crowd. The *oni* are welcomed to chase away evil and bring good luck to those touched by the sparks. Visitors are welcome to view an explanatory video, which captures some of the exuberant atmosphere, at the nearby Historical Museum.