

Lecture Hall

The Toshodaiji Lecture Hall (Kodo) exhibits an elegance attesting to its former role as an assembly hall within the grounds of Heijo Palace, the imperial residence in Heijokyo (present-day Nara) during the Nara period (710–794). It was presented to the temple by the court in around 760 and subsequently modified as the spacious structure we see today.

Like many buildings at Toshodaiji, the Lecture Hall is a National Treasure and a building of some architectural significance: It is the only surviving structure that retains vestiges of the Heijo Palace, which was located just northeast of the temple at a time when this area was at the heart of the Nara capital.

The building features a hip-and-gable (*irimoya-zukuri*) roof, a style introduced from China in the sixth century that has been used in temple and shrine architecture ever since. The gabled part covers the core (*moya*) of the building, while the hipped roof covers raised aisles (*hisashi*) running around the outside of the core. Like many other buildings, the roof itself is covered by the traditional tiling method known as *hon kawarabuki* composed of broad, flat concave tiles linked by semi-cylindrical convex tiles. The base of the building is raised to protect the structure from flooding and dampness. Much of the structure you see today is believed to date back to the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

Among the Buddhist statues inside is the hall's principal image, Miroku Nyorai, and one depicting Zochoten, one of the four heavenly kings, which is a National Treasure from the Nara period. There are also lecterns from which, in time-honored fashion, discussions and debates about the Buddhist precepts are conducted. Today these are formal occasions that take place twice a year. One of them, in May, includes a performance of court music and dance (*gagaku*), among them a piece entitled "Bairo" that was introduced by temple founder Ganjin.