

Lower Daigo (Shimo-Daigo)

Kon-dō, The Golden Hall (National Treasure)

The Kon-dō, main hall or literally Golden Hall, is the central feature of the Shimo-Daigo area and a National Treasure. It was originally built in 926, but the structure burned down twice in the 600 years that followed. Especially the fire 1470 in the midst of the Ōnin War devastated larger areas of the temple. The current building was relocated by ship from another temple (Mangan-ji, Yuasa) on the Kii Peninsula on the orders of Toyotomi Hideyoshi during the great reconstruction period.

Due to this unusual relocation, the architecture features three style elements that are a unique combination of different periods of architectural history: original elements from the Heian period, repairs dating to the Kamakura period when the building stood on the Kii peninsula, and finally the reconstructions from the Momoyama period.

The hall also enshrines a Yakushi Nyorai triad, with the sun and moon Bodhisattvas Nikkō and Gekkō flanking him, with the addition of the Shitennō or Four Heavenly Kings, who all were part of the relocation from the south to the capital. They can be dated to the Kamakura period (1185–1333) due to their detailed and precise carvings and especially in case of the guardian figures their strong masculinity, whereas two of the guardians – Jikoku-ten and Zōchō-ten – may be later addition. The carver possibly belonged to the Zen atelier active around Nara, which general style resonated a gentler one leaning on the Heian period.

The hall serves as venue for regular sacral ceremonies, including the chanting of sutras, by monks and nuns of the monastery of Daigo-ji. The most famous ceremony is the one popularly called the Godairi-san on the 23rd of February, a tradition that can be traced back all the way to the year 907. Prior to the main day, the entire monastery with more than 1000 monks and nuns offers prayers in the hall open to the public for one week. The most spectacular part of the Godairi-san is the Mochiage, Mochi Lifting Competition, where men and women can challenge each other to lift and hold a huge *mochi* cake. Men hold a 150 kg piece, women a 90 kg piece, with the demonstration of strength in conjunction with the powerful protection of the Five Wisdom Kings being a combined prayer for health and physical strength.