

Benten-dō

The hall is dedicated to Benzai-ten, the deity of the arts and knowledge. She is popular as the only female deity of the well-known Seven Deities of Good Fortune (Shichi Fukujin), a Japanese group of prosperity deities originating in other belief systems including Hinduism and Taoism. Each one of the seven represents a different virtue and bestow varying benefits, in the current constellation known since the 17th century. Benzai-ten, representing joy, is traceable to the Hindu deity of wisdom, music and art. She is usually depicted playing the *biwa* lute.

This small chapel was built in 1930 to commemorate the millennial anniversary of the passing of Emperor Daigo. It has a closed structure and the altar is only visible through a lattice, nevertheless, it is one of the most famous photogenic spots within Daigo-ji. The typical Japanese Shintoist features of Benten-dō, such as white walls and wooden parts in vermillion red, are believed to ward off calamity. Surrounded by trees appearing in the middle of the *koi* (carp) pond with an arched bridge, it has the aura of illuminous solemnity. The site is particularly popular in autumn when the foliage of the maple and the ginkgo trees turn hues of yellow and red.