

Visiting the Phoenix Hall

Points to Remember for Visitors to the Phoenix Hall:

- Taking pictures inside the hall and taking pictures of the interior from outside the hall are strictly prohibited.
- Do not touch or lean on the pillars or doors.
- Please make sure your personal belongings do not come into contact with anything inside the hall.
- Do not pass beyond the boundaries marked by bamboo poles. These areas are off limits.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Additional Information about the Phoenix Hall Interior

Byodoin Temple

The origin of Byodoin Temple can be traced back to 1052, when Fujiwara no Yorimichi, the Kanpaku, or chief advisor to the emperor at the time, built a temple on the location of a villa he had received from his father, Michinaga. At the time it was believed that 1052 was the beginning of a degenerate age, Mappo (“the end of the Law”), for Buddhism. Byodoin was built with the goal of reaching the Pure Land (Jodo) of Amida (Sk. Amitabha) Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Life and Light.

The Phoenix Hall (Ho-o-do)

With its structure resembling a bird spreading its wings, what is now called the Phoenix Hall was built in 1053. It was then known as the Amida Hall, as it was built to enshrine an image of Amida Buddha, the central object of worship in Pure Land Buddhism. Two bronze phoenix figures are perched on the roof that symbolize renewal and resurrection, and at the beginning of the Edo period (1603–1867) the structure came to be called the Phoenix Hall.

The Principal Image: Statue of Amida Buddha

The principal image of the Phoenix Hall is Amida Buddha, who possesses infinite merit resulting from good deeds over countless past lives as a bodhisattva. By transferring his merit to the devout, he can save even the worst sinners.

The statue, as well as its halo and canopy, are made entirely of Japanese cypress

wood using a technique called *yosegi-zukuri*, or joined-block construction. The *yosegi-zukuri* technique was perfected by Jocho (d. 1057), creator of this statue and the greatest sculptor of Buddhist images in the Heian period (794–1185). The soft, rounded style of his sculptures had a significant influence on future generations of Buddhist statue construction. This is the only statue of this Buddha known to have been made by Jocho that employs this particular technique and style.

Worshipping Bodhisattvas on Clouds

The small statues sitting on clouds that appear to float as they hang on the white wall of the hall are called the Unchu Kuyo Bosatsu, or “Worshipping Bodhisattvas on Clouds.” Dancing and playing musical instruments as they move about the Pure Land, the bodhisattvas praise Amida Buddha. There are fifty-two statues in all, but half of the originals have been moved to the Hoshokan, the Byodoin Temple museum, where visitors can view them up close. These were replaced with replicas in the hall itself.

Wall and Door Paintings

Murals known as *Kuhon Raiko-zu* (Nine Forms of Welcoming the Dead to the Pure Land) cover the doors and walls inside the hall. The variety of scenes depict Amida Buddha, accompanied by a procession of bodhisattvas and celestial beings, coming to take the soul of a dead or dying person to the Pure Land. The paintings on the walls are hard to see since the colors have faded over time. The reproductions of the door paintings created around 1970 give visitors a clear idea of what the scenes and coloring of the paintings originally looked like.

Phoenix Hall Repairs

The Phoenix Hall had few repairs for more than half a century since the 1960s. In that time, tiles suffered damage, paint began to peel in many areas, and a number of wooden sections deteriorated. In response to the urgent need for repairs, restoration was begun in 2012. Over the next three years, the exterior of the hall was restored and all the tiles replaced. Extensive research was carried out to ensure that the structure was restored as closely as possible to the way it looked in the Heian period (794–1185). New tiles were made as faithfully as possible to the originals. In addition, the phoenix statues on the roof, decorative fittings, and other metal fixtures were all restored to a brilliant golden color. Seen from the opposite side of the pond, the “Phoenix” has been resurrected as a glorious palace in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha.