

## Daishoin: Kannondo Hall

The largest and most eye-catching building at Daishoin, Kannondo Hall contains several of the temple's most significant sites of worship. While not officially Daishoin's main hall (*hondo*), an honor that belongs to Chokugando Hall farther up the hill, Kannondo has plenty for visitors to see. The statue in the middle of the main room and directly across from the entrance depicts Juichimen Kannon, the eleven-headed bodhisattva of compassion. This statue was the primary Buddhist deity of Itsukushima Shrine until 1868, when the government ordered the separation of Shinto and Buddhism and thus ended a tradition of syncretism that had dominated religious thought and practice in Japan for more than a thousand years. All Buddhist imagery had to be removed from Shinto shrines, leaving the Juichimen Kannon without a home. The statue was moved to Daishoin, where a new hall, the Kannondo, was built to house it. The current building was rebuilt in 1932 after the first Kannondo burned down in 1887.

The room on the left side of the hall commemorates the visit of Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) to Daishoin in 1885, when the monarch's quarters were built on this same site. The displays include a painting depicting the imperial visit and other artifacts related to that momentous occasion.

The room on the right side stands out with its vivid streamers and other decorations, the colors of which also adorn the large, golden Buddha statue in the middle of the chamber. This statue depicts the bodhisattva Miroku, a central figure in both Shingon and Tibetan Buddhism, and was consecrated by the Dalai Lama on his visit to Daishoin in 2006. The Miroku Room, which also displays a Tibetan sand mandala, is tangible proof of the close relationship between Shingon and Tibetan Buddhism, esoteric traditions with common doctrinal roots.

On the verandah in front of the hall, a narrow staircase leads visitors down into the darkness underneath the structure. This is the entrance to the *kaidan meguri*, a pitch-black corridor that symbolizes the body of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. Passing through it is said to cleanse the mind and raise one's spirits. Along the corridor's left wall are images that represent the deities of 37 temples dedicated to Kannon in the Chugoku region (of which Miyajima is part). Saying a prayer in front of each of the 37 images is said to earn the same blessings as completing the entire 1,500-kilometer Chugoku Kannon pilgrimage.