

## **Daishoin: Maniden Hall**

Maniden Hall is an ornate structure that towers over the inner part of the Daishoin temple grounds. It is dedicated to Sanki Daigongen (“Three Great Oni Gongen”), a group of deities sometimes called “the Awesome Forest Deities of Mt. Misen.” An *oni* is an ogre-like being regarded as having divine qualities, while a *gongen* is a Buddha manifested as a Shinto deity. Belief in Sanki Daigongen is unique to Miyajima and is a reminder of how ancient folk beliefs, Shinto, and Buddhism, now thought of as separate, were indivisibly linked in Japan for more than a thousand years. The deities are officially enshrined in Sankido Hall on the peak of Mt. Misen, but the Maniden offers an alternative site of prayer for those who are unable to make the climb to the main sanctuary.

The structure is one of the newest at Daishoin. It was built in 1976 in the distinctive *gongen-zukuri* style, in which the *haiden* (worship hall) and *honden* (main sanctuary) are both under one roof and connected by a narrow corridor such that the building resembles the shape of a letter H. The entrance features a curved gable and intricately carved wooden statues of dragons and other imaginary creatures. Passing into the building, visitors may ascend a steep set of stairs to the second floor, which looks out over the temple grounds toward the sea. One should, however, refrain from entering the building when a prayer ceremony is in progress.