

Daishoin: Daishido Hall

The innermost hall on the grounds of Daishoin is dedicated to Kukai (774–835), the Buddhist priest renowned as the founder of both Shingon Buddhism and Daishoin itself. According to legend, Kukai visited Mt. Misen in the year 806 to perform ascetic rites, including the *goma* fire ritual that remains a central part of Shingon practice. This event is considered the origin of Daishoin, and the sacred fire lit by Kukai more than 1,200 years ago is said to have burned on the mountain ever since. Kukai went on to accomplish many other great deeds during his lifetime, including establishing a monastery on Mt. Koya, a site in present-day Wakayama Prefecture that now hosts a vast complex of temples and monasteries and is one of the holiest sites in Shingon. Kukai's exploits earned him the posthumous title of Kobo Daishi, or "Grand Master of Buddhist Teaching." This is shortened to just "Daishi" in Daishido, which translates to "Hall of the Grand Master." The building dates back to the Edo period (1603–1868) and is one of the few structures at Daishoin to have escaped destruction in 1887, when a fire burned most of the temple to the ground. A simple bronze statue of Kukai is enshrined in the hall.