

## **Daishoin: Henjokutsu**

Henjokutsu, which translates to “hall of boundless light,” is an underground chamber located directly underneath Daishido Hall. Here, “boundless light” refers to the radiance of the Buddha, which is thought to guide all those who believe in him through the darkness of material life and into salvation. The room is bathed in the dim light of hundreds of copper lanterns that cover the ceiling and are inscribed with the names of their donors.

The main feature of the Henjokutsu is a set of 88 statues that line the walls of the chamber and represent the deities of the 88 temples of the Shikoku Pilgrimage, a 1,200-kilometer journey that can take several months to complete on foot. Here, believers unable to walk the entire length of the route can pray at all 88 locations in one place. Underneath the square tile in front of each statue is a bag of sand from the temple enshrining the deity depicted. This sand represents the sacred ground of the temple and allows the pilgrim who steps on it to receive the same blessings as a visitor to the actual site. The middle of the hall is occupied by two lines of slightly larger statues: the ones on the left (as seen from the entrance) each represents one of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, while the 13 on the right depict the deities associated with traditional Buddhist funerals. Watching over all of these from the front of the chamber are two likenesses of the Amida Buddha.