

## **Daishoin: Misen Hondo Hall**

Misen Hondo, the main site of prayer on Mt. Misen, stands on the spot where the famous Buddhist priest Kukai (774–835) is said to have spent a hundred days engaged in grueling ascetic practices in 806. This event is now equated with the founding of Daishoin Temple and is also considered the origin of the name of Mt. Misen, as Kukai is said to have named the peak for its resemblance to Mt. Shumisen, the center of the world in Buddhist cosmology.

Within Misen Hondo stands a statue of the bodhisattva Kokuzo (Sanskrit: Akasagarbha), a deity associated with wisdom and wealth, whose mantra Kukai is said to have chanted ceaselessly during his stay on Mt. Misen. On the back wall, on either side of the Kokuzo statue, are two mandalas (depictions of the Buddhist cosmos). The one on the left portrays the Diamond Realm (Kongokai), the domain of unchanging wisdom, while the one on the right depicts the Womb Realm (Taizokai), the world of physical phenomena. Together they make up the Mandala of the Two Realms, the most widely used mandala in esoteric Shingon Buddhism, to which Daishoin subscribes.

The current Misen Hondo was built after a typhoon destroyed the previous hall in 1991. The old structure was much larger than its successor, with room for up to 24 monks to conduct rites while sitting in rows on the floor. Such practices were commonplace here until the years preceding World War II but were discontinued when the Japanese military seized the peak of Mt. Misen to use it as an observation outpost during the war.