

## Daishoin: Sankido Hall

Sankido Hall on Mt. Misen enshrines Sanki Daigongen (“Three Great Oni Gongen”), a group of deities also known as “the Awesome Forest Deities of Mt. Misen.” An *oni* is an ogre-like being regarded as having divine qualities, and a *gongen* is a Buddha manifested as a Shinto deity. The trio consists of Tsuicho Kishin, an *oni* version of Dainichi, the supreme Buddha of the cosmos; Jibi Kishin, a manifestation of the bodhisattva Kokuzo; and Mara Kishin, the *oni* form of Fudo Myo-o, one of the Five Wisdom Kings of Buddhism. Unique to Miyajima, these deities contain elements of three belief traditions: ancient mountain asceticism, in which Mt. Misen itself and various features on it were worshiped as deities, esoteric Shingon Buddhism, and Shinto conceptions of divinity.

This amalgamation of beliefs is clearly visible at Sankido Hall, where the Awesome Forest Deities are represented by round mirrors placed on the altar. The mirror is a Shinto symbol often employed at shrines that acts as an interface between the spiritual and physical worlds. At Sankido Hall, however, the mirrors are accompanied by Buddhist statues depicting the three deities, though these are hidden behind a curtain and cannot be viewed. On the walls hang two large masks that portray *tengu*, long-nosed, goblin-like creatures considered servants of Sanki Daigongen and traditionally associated with mountain asceticism.

Sanki Daigongen are thought to have been worshiped on Mt. Misen since the ninth century, but the deities have also played a notable role in the mountain’s modern history. The current trail to the peak was financed in large part by Ito Hirobumi (1841–1909), the first prime minister of Japan, who was a keen devotee of Sanki Daigongen. Ito’s calligraphy is displayed in the current Sankido Hall, which was rebuilt in 1991.