

Daishoin: Kaidan Meguri

Many visitors to Daishoin's Kannondo Hall wonder where the narrow but eye-catching staircase on the hall's front verandah leads. This is the entrance to the *kaidan meguri*, a corridor underneath the structure, and is open to the public. The pitch-black passageway symbolizes the body of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. Passing through it is said to cleanse the mind and raise one's spirits. The images along the left wall of the corridor represent the deities of 37 temples dedicated to Kannon in the Chugoku region (of which Miyajima is part). Underneath the carpet in front of each image is a bag of sand from the temple enshrining the deity depicted, and this sand represents the sacred ground of the temple. Saying a prayer in front of each of the 37 images is said to allow one to receive the same blessings as a traveler who completes the entire 1,500-kilometer Chugoku Kannon pilgrimage. This convenient solution was originally devised for members of the aristocracy, who could not be burdened with the physical exertion of walking across rough terrain for weeks on end.