

Hasedera Temple

Statue of Eleven-Headed Kannon

Important Cultural Property

This statue of Kannon, also known as the bodhisattva of mercy, is Hasedera's principal object of worship. At 10.18 meters, it is also one of the tallest wooden Kannon statues in Japan, and has eleven heads placed on top of its main head. The original statue upon which this image is based was carved in the eighth century from a camphor tree considered to be sacred. The statue was burned several times, but remade with a piece of the original camphor wood placed inside. This statue, created in 1538, is covered in shining lacquer and gold leaf. This Kannon was created to bring happiness to all the people and that belief is still cherished to this day. While the main topmost head here shows a benevolent expression in line with that role, the other ten heads display a range of expressions. There are several interpretations as to why there are eleven heads, including the belief that the lower ten represent stages on the path to enlightenment, while the uppermost represents buddhahood.

In the hands of this statue are some unusual objects for a Kannon: a Buddhist rosary and priest's staff in the right hand. Equally unusual, this Kannon stands on a simple stone platform that is not adorned with lotus petals. This symbolizes Kannon's existence in the everyday world and sympathy for the prayers of supplicants. The gold leaf has been rubbed off the feet by worshippers. Visitors are still allowed into the room displaying the statue twice a year, from early March to late June and from mid-October to early December.