

Eikandō through the Four Seasons

Throughout the year, the Eikandō temple grounds shift from one scene of seasonal beauty to the next. Each season is accompanied by annual events, and the highlight of the year is in autumn, when the temple holds a special month-long exhibition of its treasures and its famous maples are illuminated every night.

Spring

Beginning in early February, the white plum trees in the garden near the Shaka-dō Hall bloom first. They are followed in March by the cherry blossoms, which reach the peak of their bloom in early April. A sweeping vista of the flowers in the temple grounds can be seen from the base of the Many-jeweled Pagoda (Tahōtō). The Buddha's birthday (*kanbutsue*) is celebrated on April 8, and a memorial service for the founders of the Pure Land school is held at the end of the month.

Summer

In summer, first the azaleas and later the crape myrtles bloom on the temple grounds, and Hōjōike Pond becomes encircled with blossoms. A three-day period of outdoor sermons called the Ryokuin Hōwa is held each year between late July and early August. Attendance of these sermons is free, and the traditional monks' breakfast of rice porridge (*okayu*) is provided.

Autumn

Eikandō is well known as the "temple of the maples" (*momiji no Eikandō*), and in autumn the Japanese maples trees on its grounds take on sublime tints of crimson and russet. From early November to early December, the temple holds a special exhibition of its relics, and the Gasen-dō Hall is opened for visitors to view the masterful artwork inside. During this same period, the grounds are illuminated between 5:30 and 8:30 each evening.

Winter

In winter, the snow-covered temple grounds take on an austere and contemplative atmosphere. Several important Buddhist holidays are celebrated in winter, including Bodhi Day (Jōdōe) on December 8, which marks the day that the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, achieved enlightenment. At midnight on December 31, the temple bell is rung 108 times to sweep away *bonnō* (Sanskrit: *kṛśā*), impure states of mind such as depression or jealousy that obstruct the proper reception of Buddhist teaching. Early in

the morning on February 15, the monks conduct a multi-hour session of circumambulation around the Looking-back Amida statue in honor of the monk Eikan's miraculous experience in 1082. This session is open to outside participants by reservation. (See Eikandō's website for details.)