

Steam Bath (*Unshitsu*)

This steam bath (*unshitsu*) is a modern restoration of a building from the Edo period (1603–1867). It functioned as part of the Yakuōin, a hall on the temple grounds where the sick could receive medical care. The steam bath, which works like a sauna, was used to clean sores or wounds and prevent infection. The first steam bath at Eikandō was established by Eikan (1033–1111), the seventh abbot, who led many important developments for the temple and is considered Eikandō's "great revitalizer." Eikan was very involved in caring for the poor and sick, and he established the Yakuōin in 1097.

Before modern plumbing, the temple monks also used the steam bath. Water was used sparingly, and each monk received only two bucketfuls with which to bathe. This small amount of water could be used most efficiently by taking a steam bath and wiping away the sweat and condensation. When using the *unshitsu*, water is boiled underneath the wooden stall, which fills with steam. The earliest known recorded reference to steam baths such as these dates back to the early tenth century.