

Gokuraku Jodo Ceiling Painting

The paintings on the ceiling of Ojo-Gokuraku-in have been largely blackened by centuries of burning tapers made from plant oils. For this reason, the images were recreated in the nearby Ennyu-zo exhibition space as they would have appeared when they were first painted in the Heian period (897–1185).

The work depicts Gokuraku Jodo, or the Pure Land paradise of perfect bliss, in vivid blues, oranges, and pinks. The design depicts bodhisattvas along the side panels, including 10 seated on clouds playing musical instruments such as lutes, drums, and flutes. According to Buddhist teachings, all music in paradise sounds like the words of the Buddha.

On the facing panel are a further eight bodhisattvas conducting a memorial service at which any wish can be granted. Heavenly maidens soar through the skies above, surrounded by the falling petals of the *mandara*, one of four flowers that bloom only in paradise.

Ojo-Gokuraku-in, also known as Amida Hall, was constructed in 986 by the priest Eshin Sozu (942–1017) and his sister Anyo Ni (953–1034) as a memorial to their late parents. It was most recently reconstructed in 1143.

The original paintings adorned the interior of an unusual roof resembling the upturned hull of a boat. This design was conceived to accommodate the Amida Trinity statue within.