

Sanjūsangendō's Annual Observances

Sanjūsangendō is a place of living traditions. Annual observances punctuate the ritual calendar, providing worshipers and the community with opportunities to engage with the temple in ways that are both deeply devotional and festive. The most important annual observance takes place on the second or third Sunday of every year. In this solemn rite that traces its roots to ancient India, visitors pour water over themselves from a vessel made of willow wood that has been blessed by Kannon. This is thought to cure a variety of illnesses, especially headaches.

Sanjūsangendō's annual archery contest (Tōshiya), its most famous and colorful event, is held later that same day. Dressed in their finest kimono and *hakama* trousers, contestants from across the country come to test their archery skills in the shadow of Sanjūsangendō's long veranda. The building's impressive length and evenly spaced wooden columns make it an ideal location for this contest it has hosted for centuries. Today, the event is closely associated with Coming of Age Day, considered to be a rite of passage by participants who will turn twenty that year.

Other major festivals include Setsubun on February 3rd, the day traditionally thought to divide winter and spring. On the first Sunday of May, the temple holds its annual Founder's Day, when the community honors the memory and legacy of retired Emperor Goshirakawa, who commissioned the construction of Sanjūsangendō in 1164.