

Myōhōin's Kuri (Kitchen and Administrative Quarters)

The largest structure at Myōhōin is the multi-storied Kuri that stands just inside the temple's front entrance. Built in the late sixteenth century, this National Treasure is a quintessential example of architecture from the Momoyama period (1573–1603).

In Buddhist temples, *kuri* are buildings that serve as the kitchen, and often as the administrative center as well. The function of Myōhōin's Kuri as a kitchen is apparent in the structural composition, such as the absence of an interior ceiling. Thick beams support a matrix of rafters and purlins that extend well over 15 meters into the attic. At the apex of the roof is an elevated ventilator that functions as an innovative exhaust system, allowing smoke and steam from the kitchen to escape safely. The timbers are blackened by the soot of more than four centuries.

The Kuri's finest moment came in 1595 when Toyotomi Hideyoshi held a massive memorial ceremony at the adjacent temple of Hōkōji. For days, operations at the Kuri were at full tilt to provide food and logistical support to the thousands of visiting guests, from the meanest laborer to the most esteemed provincial warlord.

Myōhōin's historical connection to the court is evident in the structure that stands directly to the south of the Kuri—a carriage port built from Japanese cypress with a rounded, cusped roof. Adorned with a chrysanthemum crest, an unmistakable symbol of the imperial family, the port was reserved for the exclusive use of messengers from the court.

