

Zentsuji Temple: Sunafumi Dojo

The Shikoku Pilgrimage is a 1,200-kilometer journey to 88 temples across four prefectures and can take several months to complete on foot. Walking the pilgrimage, which is itself a religious practice, may not be possible for many, particularly those with mobility issues and other physical ailments. Fortunately, believers unable to walk the entire length of the route can pray at all 88 temples in one place at Sunafumi Dojo, a low-lit room in the Henjokaku building on the western side of the Zentsuji temple complex. Opened in 2006 to mark the 1,200th anniversary of Zentsuji's founding, Sunafumi Dojo houses 88 wooden statues that represent the deities of the temples along the pilgrimage route. The figures were all carved by the Kyoto-based sculptor Matsumoto Myokei and differ slightly from each other, be it in posture, facial expression, or accessory items. Underneath the red carpet in front of each statue is a bag of sand from the temple enshrining the deity depicted. This sand represents the sacred ground of the temple and allows the pilgrim who steps on it to receive the same blessings as a visitor to the actual sanctuary. Sunafumi Dojo is a solemn place of prayer, but it is also a remarkably beautiful space that is well worth the detour for anyone visiting Zentsuji.