

Zentsuji Temple: Mieido Hall and Kaidan Meguri

The Mieido Hall stands at the center of Sai-in, the western part of Zentsuji Temple. The hall is located on the site of the ancestral home of the Saeki family, birthplace in 774 of Kukai, the founder of Zentsuji and one of the most influential Buddhist priests in Japanese history. Sai-in was originally established during the Kamakura period (1185–1333) to honor Kukai and allow followers of the Shingon school of Buddhism, which Kukai founded, to pray at the place of his birth. The current Mieido Hall is a relatively recent structure, having been built in 1831 around a small inner sanctum (*okuden*), which is said to be located on the exact site of the chamber in which Kukai let out his first cry. The *okuden* is not open to the public, but visitors do have the opportunity to pass directly underneath it. This is done by braving the *kaidan meguri*, a pitch-black corridor that snakes below Mieido Hall. Entering the complete darkness of the *kaidan meguri*, visitors are asked to orient themselves by keeping their left hand on the left wall and proceed carefully. The utter lack of light makes for a meditative experience, which is well worth the ¥500 entrance fee. *Kaidan meguri* tickets include access to the Zentsuji treasure hall, where statues of Buddhist deities and other precious possessions are displayed.