

Daiganji Temple

Daiganji Temple (also known as Kikyozan Hokoin Daiganji) is a Shingon Buddhist temple dedicated to Benzaiten, the goddess of music, wisdom, and wealth. Located right beside the exit of Itsukushima Shrine, the temple may look at first glance like part of the shrine itself. In fact, the two sites have a rich shared history dating back at least 800 years.

Centuries ago, Daiganji Temple's grounds were much larger than they are today, encompassing Itsukushima Shrine itself as well as the island's five-story pagoda. Daiganji served as the administrative center for Itsukushima Shrine. The temple handled the shrine's upkeep, and even solicited donations from around the country to rebuild Itsukushima's famous torii gate. Pilgrims to Itsukushima Shrine would invariably stop at Daiganji Temple, too. Like many Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples at the time, the two had a syncretic relationship involving deities and rituals drawn from each other's traditions.

However, during the Meiji era (1868–1912), the government ordered that Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples be completely separated, ending the close association between the two. One of the most tangible effects of this decree was that Buddhist sculptures previously enshrined at Shinto sites had to be removed. Many sculptures from around Miyajima were brought to Daiganji. Unfortunately, the policy also led to a sharp decline in the size and influence of the temple.

Today, Daiganji's three main buildings are the Main Gate (sanmon), the Main Hall (hondo), and the recently rebuilt Gomado Hall. They encircle what was once a garden leading to Itsukushima Shrine. In the center of the old garden is a large pine tree with nine branching trunks that was planted by Ito Hirobumi (1841–1909), Japan's first prime minister. The temple's annual festival is held on June 17.