

## Bell Tower

Hokokuji's bell tower, located in front of the main hall (*hondo*), is the only structure on the temple grounds with a traditional thatched roof. The main hall had a thatched roof until the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 damaged most of the temple buildings, including the main hall. The main hall was given a tiled roof when the temple was rebuilt, but the distinctive arch of the bell tower's thatched roof, capped with a few rows of tiles, suggests how the original roof of the main hall would have looked.

The temple bell was requisitioned during World War II and melted down, but a new one was cast after the war. The bell was traditionally used to mark time for Buddhist practice throughout the day, but because Hokokuji is located in what has become a residential area, the bell is only rung now on special occasions. For example, during the New Year's ceremony, the bell is rung at midnight 108 times—once for each of the 108 worldly desires humans are believed to suffer from in Buddhism—to symbolize a fresh start to the new year.

In the temple cemetery beside the bell tower is a ginkgo tree believed to be 300 years old. In autumn, its bright yellow leaves blanket the grounds. In spring, the nearby cherry blossoms and azaleas fill the area with hues of pink.