

Hakujukan, the Hotel Close to Zen

Hakujukan is a hotel that exists both literally and figuratively on the border between Eiheiiji Temple and the world outside. It was established in 2019 with the goal of creating a space that blends the environment of a luxurious hotel with a variety of Zen-related experiences and activities. Guests at Hakujukan can participate in zazen (seated Zen practice) sessions and attend the temple's morning service, then enjoy quality cuisine prepared according to Zen precepts before relaxing in comfortable, hotel-style accommodations at the end of the day.

Hakujukan opened in 2019 as part of a larger revitalization project managed jointly by Eiheiiji Temple, the town of Eiheiiji, and Fukui Prefecture. The inn describes its charm with the word *shinzen*, which means both “goodwill” and “close to Zen.” The close connection to Zen is physically manifested in the structure of Hakujukan: much of the cedar wood used in its construction was taken from forested land owned by the temple.

As guests enter the lobby, they are greeted by a large *gyoku*, a hanging wood carving of a creature with the body of a fish and the head of a dragon. Prior to being installed at Hakujukan, the *gyoku* hung in Eiheiiji Temple. Its eyes are open and alert, reminding the monks (and now guests) to be vigilant in their daily practice. At Eiheiiji Temple, a similar *gyoku* is struck with a wooden mallet to announce the beginning of meals or lectures.

The Kaiya-no-ma, a multipurpose space with tatami (woven straw mat) floors, is located to the right of the entrance. It is often used to host guests for zazen sessions and discussions with monks from Eiheiiji Temple. One of the exterior walls is equipped with sliding screen doors that open out into a garden of moss and rocks. A small library located to the left of the entrance, near the reception desk, contains a collection of material in multiple languages on topics such as the history of Zen Buddhism, Eiheiiji Temple, and Zen practices.

Restaurant Suisen, located on the first floor, specializes in *shōjin ryōri*, or Buddhist vegetarian cuisine. The chefs at Suisen studied the appropriate preparation methods under the instruction of the *tenzo* (head cook) of Eiheiiji Temple. The *shōjin ryōri* at Suisen is presented in a multi-course style called *kaiseki ryōri*, which is commonly served at traditional inns. The meals served at Suisen follow the principles of *shōjin ryōri* while allowing guests to sample a wide variety of local delicacies, including sake and

ingredients such as meat, which would not be used in the more austere cooking served at the temple.

The hallway leading to the restaurant contains a gallery of calligraphic works to match the current season, as well as paintings showing scenes from the life of Zen Master Dōgen (1200–1253), the founder of the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism in Japan. There is also a small shop where guests can purchase souvenirs, such as traditional sweets or lacquered chopsticks.

The second and third floors contain 18 spacious guest rooms that blend Japanese and Western styles. Hakujukan is designed so that every room directly faces the Eiheiiji River, which flows alongside the hotel. The rooms are all named after different flowers, and the decorative alcove (*tokonoma*) in each room displays a painting of that flower by artist Masuda Yōichirō (b. 1981). The flowers were chosen from among those featured in the 230 paintings that decorate the coffered ceiling of the Sanshōkaku (Reception Hall) at Eiheiiji Temple.

The Echizen region (Fukui Prefecture) is famous for its traditional craft products, and the rooms are filled with objects connected to this heritage. The large pieces of artwork above the beds were made using Echizen handmade paper (*echizen-washi*), and the sinks and cups are locally made ceramics. There are many galleries in the surrounding area where guests can experience making some of these traditional crafts themselves.

Each hotel room has a Western-style shower stall, but a day spent in Eiheiiji is best concluded with a hot bath. Kōsuikai, a large bathing area, is located on the second floor of the hotel. There are separate sections for men and women, and each section features both an indoor and an outdoor bath. Even in the depths of winter, the steamy baths are a warm, calm place to soak while listening to the sound of the Eiheiiji River and the distant ringing of the temple bell.