

## Experiencing Zen at Hakujukan

Monks live by a strict set of rules at Eiheiiji Temple, and guests who stay at lodging facilities within the temple grounds must adhere to the same practices. Guests staying at Hakujukan, which is located just outside the temple, can have an authentic experience of Zen while also enjoying the numerous sights, tastes, and crafts for which the region is known. The staff at Hakujukan can also arrange specific activities at Eiheiiji, such as attendance at the morning service or a zazen (seated Zen practice) session at the temple.

The specific procedures of Zen practice can be intimidating at first. In order to make Zen more accessible to beginners, Hakujukan has staff members called “Zen concierges” who have been trained by monks at Eiheiiji Temple. Zen concierges guide guests through some of the Zen-related activities at the hotel and act as liaisons with the temple. In order to become a Zen concierge, Hakujukan staff must first pass a written examination on the history and philosophy of Zen Buddhism and participate in an intensive three-day zazen program at the temple. Staff members who complete this training are authorized to guide guests through a variety of voluntary Zen experiences (currently available in Japanese only).

Guests may join zazen sessions that are held each day at either Eiheiiji Temple or at Hakujukan, depending on availability. These sessions are an abbreviated form of the typical practice, and the Zen concierges will explain the proper conduct and posture that guests should maintain while sitting in zazen. Similarly, guests at Hakujukan can try the practice of sutra-copying at Hakujukan. The act of copying a Buddhist sutra by hand, called *shakyō*, has a long history and is considered a form of spiritual training.

For guests who are willing to wake up early, Zen concierges can also arrange participation in the morning service (*asa no otsutome*) at Eiheiiji Temple. Participating guests wake up around dawn, make their way to the temple, and join the monks in the Hattō (Dharma Hall), which is used for daily services and important ceremonies. Participants offer incense to a statue of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, and chant sutras with the monks, after which they receive a guided tour of the temple. Visitors who feel uncomfortable participating directly in the service are also welcome to respectfully observe from the sidelines.