

## **Kannonji Temple**

### **[LEGENDS]**

Kannonji Temple stands directly adjacent to the grounds of Kitano Tenmangu Shrine. The two were part of the same religious complex for more than 500 years, as no clear distinction was made between Buddhism and the native Shinto traditions of belief until 1868. In that year, the government ordered the two to be separated.

Kannonji's principal deity is the eleven-headed manifestation of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. The statue of this deity contained within the main hall is said to have been carved by Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), whom Kitano Tenmangu enshrines as Tenjin, the god of scholarship and the arts. The statue is displayed to the public only once every 25 years.

Byakue Kannondo, the small hall to the right of the temple entrance, houses another Kannon statue, this one a gift from a Chinese Zen monk who visited Kannonji in 1655. The statue depicts Kannon holding a child, and people pray to the deity for fertility and safe childbirth. The countless dolls displayed within the hall were donated by devotees as signs of gratitude to Kannon.

Behind the main hall is a 4.5-meter stone stupa, a type of Buddhist pagoda, that used to stand at Kitano Tenmangu but was moved to Kannonji after the separation of Shinto and Buddhism. In many Japanese Buddhist traditions, the mourning period after a death is 49 days. On the 50th day, the bereaved often gather to pray and mark the end of mourning. This stupa is thought to have been a site of such prayers for centuries.