

The Bell Crickets and Kōfuku Jizō of Kegonji Temple

Kegonji Temple is perhaps most famous for its bell crickets, or *suzumushi*, but the tradition of keeping crickets at the temple has a relatively short history. Toward the end of World War II (1945), Kegonji's eighth abbot heard bell crickets as he sat in meditation one autumn evening. The abbot noticed how the sound of the crickets cleared away his wartime anxieties, and he wanted to give every visitor the chance to be soothed by the sound as well. However, bell crickets chirp only in autumn. In order to develop the necessary conditions to keep them singing throughout the year, the abbot spent 28 years breeding and studying bell crickets.

Near the temple's main gate is a statue of Kōfuku Jizō, the Jizō of happiness. Jizō is one of the most commonly seen bodhisattvas in Japan and is said to take more than 100 different forms. Jizō is typically depicted as a barefoot monk carrying a staff in his right hand and a wish-granting jewel in his left hand. However, Kōfuku Jizō is the only iteration of the bodhisattva who is said to visit people's homes directly to grant their wishes, and the statue wears straw sandals for the sake of making these journeys. Prayers to Kōfuku Jizō are made using a *kōfuku* charm, which are sold by the temple. To ensure that your wish is granted, stand before the statue and hold the *kōfuku* charm in both hands with the character for "happiness" (幸) clearly visible. State your name and address before making your wish, and then keep the charm with you until your wish has been granted.