

### **Maniden Main Hall (Nyoirindō)**

The Maniden stands at the center of Engyōji's complex. It was on this site that the founding abbot, Shōkū (910–1007), is said to have witnessed a heavenly maiden dancing around a cherry tree while chanting holy poetry. The maiden's verse described Nyoirin Kannon (Sanskrit: Cintamanicakra), a six-armed manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, in the form of a living tree. According to the poem, Nyoirin Kannon would grant long life and prosperity and guarantee rebirth in paradise to all living beings. Inspired by the vision, Shōkū carved the cherry tree into a representation of Nyoirin Kannon and erected a tabernacle to protect it. Nyoirindō Hall was then built around the statue and tabernacle in 970.

The tabernacle reportedly remained shut, hiding the statue, until 1174, when Retired Emperor Goshirakawa (1127–1192) visited Engyōji and demanded to see it. Goshirakawa then gave the hall its present name, "Maniden," which references the jewel (Sanskrit: *mani*) at the heart of Buddhist teachings, just as the statue is the cherished center of Engyōji. Although the Maniden has been rebuilt four times, each successive structure was erected on the site where the original cherry tree stood.

Inside the Maniden, five sets of thickly lacquered doors stand behind the altar. These tabernacles enshrine the principal image of the hall, along with images of the Four Heavenly Kings (*shitennō*). The doors are opened only once each year, on January 18, when Engyōji marks the new year with its Festival of Peace and Bounty.