

Founder's Hall (Kaisandō)

The Kaisandō, or Founder's Hall, is the most important structure of an area of Engyōji known as the "inner sanctum" (*okunoin*). The hall was first built in 1007 to enshrine the sanctified remains of the founding abbot, Shōkū (910–1007). Buddhist rituals have been held here every day for more than a thousand years.

The present structure, which dates to 1673, is a classic example of freeform temple architecture from the mid-Edo period (1603–1867). The interlocking brackets that support the roof are decorated with a variety of elaborate carvings, including three mythical guardian deities (*kongō rikishi*) sculpted by the celebrated artist Hidari Jingorō (fl. 1624–1644). Legend states that originally, one mythical guardian supported the eaves at each of the building's four corners, but one of the *rikishi* was unable to bear the enormous weight, and he fled, leaving the three that can be seen today.

Following an architectural pattern common to temples of the Tendai sect, the center of the hall features a sunken chamber. The main altar supports a large reliquary with heavily lacquered doors and an intricate roof. The hall's coffered lattice ceiling is raised in the space above the reliquary, creating a symbolic division that indicates Shōkū's elevated status.

The reliquary houses a life-sized statue of Shōkū. When researchers x-rayed the statue in 2008, they discovered that its head contained bones that are believed to be those of Shōkū himself. The Founder's Hall is an Important Cultural Property.