

Shrines to the Divine Protectors Ototen and Wakaten (Gohōdō)

The twin Gohōdō shrines, which stand side-by-side within the inner sanctum (*okunoin*), enshrine Engyōji's protector deities, Ototen and Wakaten. Ototen is an avatar of the Wisdom King Fudō Myō-ō, and Wakaten is an avatar of Bishamonten (Sanskrit: Vaishravana), a celestial guardian of earthly treasures. Known as fierce protectors of Buddhist teachings, these deities are thought to have assisted Shōkū (910–1007), the founder of Engyōji, when he began his ascetic training on Mt. Shosha in 966. They have served as Engyōji's protectors from the start, featuring prominently in the temple's lore and in traditions that continue to this day. The most important observance of the calendar year at Engyōji is the Festival of Peace and Bounty held on January 18. On this special occasion, masked performers representing Ototen, the green deity, and Wakaten, the red deity, dance wildly around the temple grounds, waving a pine torch and ringing a bell.

The avatars themselves are enshrined in the twin structures—Ototen on the right and Wakaten on the left. Technically speaking, these two shrine structures are considered “principal halls” (*honden*), the buildings that enshrine the deities themselves. Typically, a semi-attached worship hall stands in front of the principal hall for visitors to make offerings and perform rituals to honor the enshrined deities. In this case, however, the worship hall is detached and faces the twin shrines from across the courtyard.