

Yakushi Hall (Yakushidō)

Yakushi Hall is the oldest structure of the Engyōji Temple complex. When major renovations were conducted on the building in 1978, artifacts from the Nara period (710–794) were discovered inside. The presence of those artifacts suggests the site had religious significance even before Engyōji's founder, Shōkū (910–1007), arrived on Mt. Shosha in 966. Numerous reconstructions and additions over the centuries have made it difficult to trace the building's architectural history with much accuracy. Nevertheless, the large main pillars and decorative roof beams suggest it was based on an early continental model of temple construction called Daibutsuyō (literally, "Great Buddha Style").

The hall is named for the statue it enshrined of Yakushi, known as the Healing Buddha or the Master of Medicine. Yakushi's associations with health and healing made him popular with members of the imperial court, and he was one of the earliest Buddhist deities to become a subject of worship after the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth century. Veneration of Yakushi became widespread in the eighth century as Buddhism became popular among the common people, and it is not unusual for temples to have a hall enshrining his image. In most cases, Yakushi is depicted holding a medicine bowl in his left hand. The statue associated with the Yakushi Hall here at Engyōji dates from the Muromachi period (1336–1573) and is currently on display on the second floor of the Jikidō (Refectory).