

### **Engyōji's Bell and Belfry**

During the early modern period (between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries), when clocks were uncommon, temple bells served an important function as a communal indicator of time. Following the traditional Chinese method of timekeeping, which divides a day into 12 periods, temple bells were rung every two hours. They were also rung on special occasions, such as new year's celebrations, and festivals, and to signal danger, such as the outbreak of a fire.

The belfry at Engyōji sits upon a sloping pyramidal base, a style called *hakama-zukuri* after its resemblance to the silhouette of a person wearing a *hakama*, a full-cut traditional garment worn from the waist down. The matrix of interlocking brackets just above its base is designed to evenly distribute the structure's substantial weight and to support the surrounding veranda. A similar set of brackets is visible under the eaves of the heavily tiled roof. The bronze bell inside is ornately decorated with imagery common to Buddhist symbology, including dragons and lotus blossoms. Although the bell bears no inscription, stylistic elements suggest that it was cast sometime in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), making it the oldest such bell in Hyogo Prefecture and also one of the oldest in Japan. The belfry itself dates to about 1332 and is thought to be a reconstruction of an even earlier structure. The belfry is an Important Cultural Property, and its bell is a Cultural Property of Hyogo Prefecture.