

Niōmon Gate and Statues of the Deva Kings

The Niōmon Gate is the main entrance to Engyōji. Located at the end of the main route to the temple on the mountain's eastern side, it marks the symbolic divide between the sacred realm of the temple and the secular world outside. Three bays wide and two bays deep, the gate follows a classical architectural model: when viewed from the outside, the tiled roof has a single central ridge line. From beneath, however, visitors can see two triangular sub-ridges tucked snugly inside the roof. This unusual design feature, called “triple ridges” (*mitsumune-zukuri*), is found only at several of the oldest temples in Japan, including Tōdaiji and Hōryūji.

Two chambers are located on either side of the gate. Inside are statues of the deva kings Naraen Kongō-ō (right) and Misshaku Kongō-ō (left). Rippling with muscle and bearing fierce expressions, these deities use their impressive size and strength to uphold Buddhist teachings and to frighten away ignorance. These statues are referred to as “Ah” and “Om.” These names are taken from the first and last letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Like the classical Greek notion of Alpha and Omega, they refer to “the beginning and the end” and symbolize universality and omnipotence. Also known as the Guardians of the Diamond Realm (Kongō-rikishi), the deva kings often guard the gates of temples throughout East Asia.