

Temple Stamps (Goshuin)

Temple stamps, called *goshuin* (literally, “crimson seals”), are elaborate handwritten seals issued by temples and shrines throughout Japan. They generally consist of a large crimson stamp accompanied by calligraphy recording the name of the site, the date, and perhaps an auspicious phrase or prayer. Although collecting a set of them in a special booklet (*goshuinchō*) is historically a devotional act with religious connotations, today many visitors collect them as souvenirs.

Originally, the seals were given to pilgrims as a form of record to indicate that they had copied a sutra and dedicated it to a temple or shrine. In Buddhism, the copying of sutras is considered a merit-accruing act that helps ensure a favorable rebirth. However, not all pilgrims had the ability to copy sutras themselves. Instead, they paid money to a temple to have sutras copied on their behalf. In this case, *goshuin* also functioned as a record of the transaction. Although sutra dedications became less common during the late Edo period (1603–1867), the act of collecting the stamps remained popular. Even today, most shrines and temples will issue one or more *goshuin* in exchange for a donation of a small, pre-established amount.

Engyōji issues six different seals at three sites around the temple grounds: Maniden Hall, the Jikidō (Refectory), and the Kaisandō (Founder’s Hall). The seal issued at Maniden commemorates a visit to the twenty-seventh site along the Thirty-three Pilgrimage Sites of Western Japan (Saikoku Sanjūsansho). This popular pilgrimage, which honors the Bodhisattva Kannon, spans 1,000 kilometers and the seven prefectures of the Kinki region. A person who visits all 33 sites during their lifetime (and collects all 33 *goshuin*) is believed to accumulate tremendous merit toward rebirth in the Buddhist Pure Land. At Founder’s Hall, visitors can request a seal that is unique to Engyōji. The calligraphy is composed in Tibetan script by a monk who trained for decades in India among the emigrant Tibetan community.