

Experiencing Buddhist Practices

Engyōji offers a number of activities for visitors who are interested in experiencing the daily life of a Buddhist monk of the Tendai sect. These range from an afternoon of seated meditation or sutra-copying (*shakyō*) to an extensive, multi-day experience in which participants stay at the temple. Engyōji can accommodate anyone, regardless of age or prior experience, although basic Japanese communication skills are required if staying overnight.

Guided meditation sessions are held at 2:00 p.m. each day in the Jōgyōdō (Circumambulatory Hall) and last for 60 minutes. Within the Tendai sect, it is believed that engaging in seated meditation in combination with other practices can allow a person to achieve enlightenment. Participation is arranged through reservation at least three days in advance, and participants should wear modest, comfortable clothing.

In Japan, sutra-copying has a long history that originates with the arrival of Buddhism sometime in the late sixth century. Sutras can be thought of as the holy scripture of Buddhism, and until the invention of mechanical printing, the only way to reproduce these texts was to copy them by hand. Reproducing any part of a sutra is considered a merit-accruing act that contributes to a favorable rebirth. At the Jikidō (Refectory), visitors can copy a single character from the Kannon Sutra, which they write on pieces of paper in the shape of lotus petals.

The two-day experience offered at Engyōji is held only a few weekends each year. During those two days, participants engage in seated meditation, practice copying and reciting sutras, take walks around the temple grounds, and attend a lecture on Buddhist teachings.