

## **Praying at a Temple**

These are the procedures pilgrims are recommended to follow when entering any of the 88 temples on the Shikoku Pilgrimage. Note that most temples are open from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, and advise against lighting candles or incense after 4.30 p.m. to prevent fires.

At the main gate

Stop briefly in front of the gate, hold your palms together, and bow once.

Purification

All of the 88 temples have a water basin for purification near the main gate. First, fill a ladle with water from the basin and pour water over your left hand. Then switch the ladle to your right hand and pour water over your right hand. Next, cup your left hand, pour some water into it, rinse your mouth with the water, and spit it out into the drainage. Lastly, raise the ladle vertically so that the remaining water pours down the handle to clean it for the next person, and return it to the basin.

Ring the bell

Some temples allow pilgrims to ring the temple bell, which is usually located near the entrance. This is done to announce one's presence to the deities. The bell should be rung only once upon entry and never when leaving, as this is considered to bring bad luck.

At the main hall

At the main hall (hondo or kondo), begin by lighting a candle and placing it in the back row of the candle stand. Remember to use a lighter or matches, as it is considered bad manners to light your candle using the flame of another. Then offer a few sticks of incense, and insert your name slip into the designated box. If you have a copied sutra, insert that into the other box. Next, consider placing a donation into the offertory box before praying. How you pray is up to you; some pilgrims prefer to pray silently, while others recite sutras. The key sutras recited at the main hall are the Heart Sutra, the mantra of the temple's principal deity, and the Mantra of Light. If you have prayer beads, rub these together before and after praying. When praying, please step to the side to make space for fellow pilgrims.

At the Daishi hall

At the Daishi hall (daishido), repeat the procedure for the main hall, from candle-lighting to prayer. The sutras recited at the Daishi hall are the Heart Sutra, the Mantra of Light, and the mantra of Kobo Daishi, the founder of the pilgrimage.

At the temple office

After praying at the main and Daishi halls, go to the temple office to have your nokyocho

notebook (and kakejiku scroll and vest, if you have them) stamped with seals and decorated with calligraphy. The temple office will also present you with a picture (miei) of the temple's principal deity.

#### Leaving the temple

When passing through the main gate on your way out, turn around toward the main hall, hold your palms together, and bow once.