

## **Guardians of Jozaiji Temple**

Statues of the Buddhist guardian deities known as Nio stand that flank the main gate of Jozaiji protect the temple from evil. These deities are typically portrayed with bare-chested, muscular physiques, fierce facial expressions, and weapons in hand. The Nio always appear as a pair, one with mouth open and the other with mouth closed. The open mouth is voicing the sound “a” and the closed mouth is voicing “n”—the first and last sounds of the Japanese syllabary (originally *a* and *hum* in Sanskrit), representing the beginning and end, or birth and death.

The statues were carved in 1825 using locally sourced stone. The Shiotatsu area was long known for the quality of its stone and the skill of its artisans; similar stone guardian figures can be found in various locations nearby.