

## Hozenji Yokochō

(target: 250–500 ww, actual: 435)

Hozenji Yokochō (“Hozenji Temple Alley”) is a quiet cobblestoned backstreet of muted red lanterns and stylish *kappo* restaurants, just around the corner from the bright lights and bustling crowds of the Dotonbori district.

The alley extends west from the northwest corner of the Sennichimae district, which lies south of the Dotonbori Canal. “Sennichi Temple” was a nickname for Hozenji Temple, referring to the belief that daily prayer there for a thousand days (*sennichi*) would lead to requests being granted, and “Sennichimae” means “In front of Sennichi.” For many centuries, Sennichimae was a gloomy neighborhood dominated by a cemetery and execution ground, but around 1870 these were moved to other sites. The vacated space quickly filled with movie theaters, *rakugo* storytelling houses, and cheap restaurants catering to students and laborers. Soon Sennichimae became the more casual and inexpensive alternative to the kabuki theaters closer to the Dotonbori Canal.

Hidden away off the main thoroughfare, Hozenji Yokochō evolved into a placid retreat for a more refined clientele. As popular tastes shifted increasingly to movies, the alley’s two *rakugo* theaters quietly upheld traditions that had entertained generations of Osaka citizens with verbal virtuosity. In the bars and restaurants of Hozenji Yokochō, *rakugo* storytellers mingled freely with patrons of their art, along with actors from the theaters of Dotonbori.

Classic Hozenji Yokochō restaurants feature *kappo* “cut and cook” cuisine, which offers the culinary sophistication of traditional multi-course *kaiseki-ryōri* in a more intimate, less formal atmosphere, usually with counter seating.

### *Mossy Statue, Handwritten Signs*

As Dotonbori businesses became known over the decades for extravagant, eye-catching signage, Hozenji Yokochō embraced a more understated aesthetic, remaining an alley of wooden storefronts and unobtrusive red lanterns instead of neon signs.

At the western end of the street, outside the temple, stands a statue of the Buddhist guardian deity Fudo Myō-ō (Acala), covered with a thick coat of green moss. This moss

is kept fresh and healthy by a steady stream of worshipers who scoop fresh spring water onto the statue before praying for success in commercial endeavors.

The east and west entrances to Hozenji Yokocho are marked by large wooden signs in calligraphy by local luminaries—to the east, *rakugo* master Katsura Harudanji III; to the west, Fujiyama Kanbi, comic actor of stage and screen. Fujiyama's sign is famous for a missing stroke in the character for *zen* (meaning "good"), and many explanations have been offered for why. Some say it tacitly urges patrons to ask their bartender for "one more!" while others claim that Fujiyama himself cheekily remarked, "I'm not *that* good" as he took up the brush. The true reason is lost to history.