

## **Daihoji Temple**

For centuries, a significant proportion of travelers journeying between China and Japan would pass through the Tamanoura area in southwestern Goto, at the western end of the Japanese archipelago. There are many reminders of these voyages on the seaside grounds of Daihoji, a Shingon Buddhist temple thought to have been established in the eighth century.

According to legend, the priest Kukai (774–835) visited Daihoji in 806 upon his return from China, where he had studied esoteric Buddhism. The teachings he absorbed in China, which he is said to have preached at Daihoji, would later lead him to establish the Shingon school. As Shingon is headquartered at Mt. Koya in central Japan, Daihoji styles itself “the Mt. Koya of the West” due to its fabled association with Kukai.

On the hill behind the temple’s main hall stands a five-tiered pagoda dating back to 1369. It is made from stone originating in what is now Fukui Prefecture, on the coast of Wakasa Bay. The stone is thought to have been brought to Goto by the island’s traders, who regularly traveled to ports in Wakasa Bay and elsewhere along the Sea of Japan coast to sell merchandise they had acquired in China. Local devotees revere the pagoda as a protector of children, and it is customary to place the stump of a newborn’s umbilical cord inside the hollow structure as an offering to the deity.

Daihoji’s bronze temple bell, cast in 1375, was also brought to the temple by a traveler: a priest on his way to China from what is now Hyogo Prefecture in central Japan. The priest donated the bell in the hope that this good deed would grant him divine protection for the perilous journey across the East China Sea. His gift is now kept in a building next to the temple’s bell tower to protect it from the elements.