

Shoryuji Temple

According to temple legend, the monk Kukai (Kobo Daishi, 774–835), the founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism, established Shoryuji in 806. He named it after a temple in China where he had studied, with kanji characters for “blue dragon.” It is said that during a severe drought in 962, the emperor ordered the chief abbot Senkan (918–984) to spend a week praying for rain. After the long-awaited rain fell, the characters for the temple name were changed to mean “victory over the dragon,” reflecting how the power of prayer overcame the will of the divine creature ruling over water.

Hondo (Main Hall) and Temple Grounds

Hanging over the Hondo entryway is a sacred rope shaped like an undulating dragon flying west toward the Nishiyama mountains. At the beginning of each year, community members make a new sacred rope by hand. Historically, the quality of the resulting rope was used to predict how bountiful the year’s harvest would be. The principal object of worship at Shoryuji is a statue of the Eleven-Headed Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. It dates to the Kamakura period (1185–1333) and is a nationally designated Important Cultural Property kept at the Kyoto National Museum outside of special ritual periods. Please note that the Hondo is generally closed to the public.

The temple grounds contain statues of Kukai as a traveling monk, Bokefuji Kannon believed to protect against dementia, Hotei (one of the Seven Gods of Fortune), and the arhat Binzuru Sonja reputed to have healing powers. A small Kasuga Jinja Shrine is dedicated to Shinto deities that guard the area around Shoryuji.

Art and Community Engagement

Shoryuji is known for *kirie*, the art of intricate paper cutting, offering items such as *kirie* temple seals (*goshuin*), *omamori* amulets, and art prints. Temple staff hold *kirie* workshops (reservation required), as well as yoga classes. On the second Sunday of each month except January and August, Shoryuji hosts the Hotei Market where people from the neighborhood sell homemade food, crafts, and eco-friendly goods, and musicians give small performances.