

Jizoin Temple

The dense bamboo grove on the grounds of Jizoin Temple is the origin of its nickname, “temple of bamboo.” Jizoin was built in 1367 by Hosokawa Yoriyuki (1329–1392), a prominent official in the Ashikaga shogunate, who invited the Zen monk Hekitan Shuko (1291–1374) to serve as the founder. The temple was burned down in the Onin War (1467–1477) and abandoned until 1686, when it was rebuilt on a smaller scale. Apart from the bamboo, Jizoin is now best known for its moss-covered garden and bright autumn foliage. The temple belongs to the Rinzai school of Buddhism.

Temple Grounds

The path from the Somon Gate is lined with maple trees and the tall, thick-stalked *moso* variety of bamboo. The Hondo (Main Hall) is also called the Jizodo (Jizo Hall) and enshrines the principal object of worship: a statue of Jizo Bodhisattva, who is often associated with protecting travelers and children. The figure is said to have been carved in the Heian period (794–1185). To the left of the Hondo are graves of the temple founders and a statue of the poet-monk Ikkyu (1394–1481) with his mother. Ikkyu, believed to be an illegitimate son of the emperor, is said to have lived in hiding at Jizoin as a child.

Hojo (Abbot's Quarters) and Garden

The detached Hojo building contains a variety of artwork, which changes depending on the season. This includes sliding screens with paintings and calligraphy by the current head of the Hosokawa family, a folding screen depicting the sixteenth-century Christian noblewoman Hosokawa Gracia, screens with *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures* illustrating stages of progression towards enlightenment, and a wood carving of a dragon preserved from the previous main hall. A small altar enshrines a statue of Bishamonten, the guardian deity of the north. One of the rooms has a heart-shaped *inome* (“boar’s eye”) window overlooking the bamboo, maples, and camellias behind the Hojo. The *inome* shape is believed to protect against fire because boars are the first animals to notice wildfires and flee.

In some Buddhist traditions, monks practice *zazen* (seated meditation) facing a wall or with eyes closed to prevent distraction, but the Rinzai school allows monks to sit on the veranda facing the garden when they meditate. The Garden of the Sixteen Arhats next to the Hojo is a dry landscape garden that became overgrown with moss when Jizoin lay in ruin. Arhats (*rakan* in Japanese) are saint-like figures who have achieved enlightenment

and understand the truth of the Buddha's teachings. In the garden, they are represented by large stones that are turned slightly to the left as if reverently looking toward Iwashimizu Hachimangu, an important mountaintop shrine south-south-east of the temple that was founded to protect Japan and the imperial family. Among the garden plants are a 500-year-old pine tree and a 350-year-old camellia.

A custom-built space behind sliding doors in the Hojo conceals a sleek black piano. On days when Jizoin holds special Temple Piano events, the chirping of birds and rustling of the wind in the garden provide a natural background to complement the sounds of music.