

Kegonji Temple (Suzumushidera)

The unique tradition of keeping thousands of bell crickets (*suzumushi*) in terrariums in a temple hall gave Kegonji its other name, Suzumushidera (“bell cricket temple”). The practice was started in the mid-twentieth century by the eighth chief abbot Taigan, who achieved enlightenment while listening to crickets on an autumn night. Seeking to soothe the hearts of others, he spent 28 years on research to determine the exact temperature, humidity, and nutrients required to encourage the bell crickets to sing year-round.

A Brief History

Kegonji was founded in 1723 by the monk Hotan (1654–1738), who was tasked with reviving the Kegon school of Buddhism in Japan. The temple served the purpose for a time, but the lack of Kegon successors led to its eventual conversion to Rinzai Zen Buddhism. The principal object of worship is Dainichi Buddha, the cosmic deity that features prominently in Kegon school teachings.

Bell Cricket Sermons

In the Guest Hall monks give thirty-minute *suzumushi seppo* (“bell cricket sermons”) accompanied by the sounds of bell crickets. The content of the sermons varies, but usually addresses topics such as temple history, Zen concepts, or Buddhist parables. Attending the sermon is considered mandatory, but those who do not understand Japanese may choose to just view the temple grounds and the garden. Next to the temple gate is a statue of Kofuku Jizo, depicting the bodhisattva in straw sandals instead of the usual bare feet. The deity is said to travel directly to the worshipper’s home to grant wishes and bring happiness if an address is provided as part of the prayer.

Please be advised that a large-scale reconstruction of Suzumushidera is planned in the near future. A new Guest Hall will open for visitors to listen to the sermons and the sounds of bell crickets.