

Restoration of the Main Sanctuary

In May 2023, full-scale renovations began on Dazaifu Tenmangū Shrine's main sanctuary (*honden*) for the first time in 124 years. The work was launched in anticipation of large-scale festivities to be held in 2027—a year that will mark the 1,125th anniversary of the death of renowned poet and scholar Sugawara Michizane (845–903). Michizane is enshrined in the *honden* as Tenjin, the Shinto deity of learning, culture, and the arts. Over the centuries since his death, Dazaifu Tenmangū has upheld Michizane's commitment to scholarship and artistic advancement, and this philosophy will guide the restoration process. Through the repairs, the shrine hopes to gain new knowledge about the sanctuary and transmit it to future generations.

Renovations to the main sanctuary include replacing its roof, re-lacquering its surfaces, and strengthening the structure against natural disasters. These are the most extensive repairs to the *honden* since it was last rebuilt, approximately 430 years ago. Architects, historians, and other researchers will analyze the condition of the roof and the structural integrity of the building, using historical techniques and materials to perform any necessary repairs.

The *honden* was built with the most advanced construction techniques of the sixteenth century. These complex methods are no longer employed in modern construction, so shrine renovations are an important opportunity to teach them to the next generation. For example, one of the areas targeted for repair is the *hiwada-buki* roof on the main sanctuary. Said to have originated over 1,300 years ago, the *hiwada-buki* technique uses layer upon layer of thin cypress bark to produce a surface that is durable, waterproof, and flexible enough to enable the sweeping curves of the roof. Veterans of the *hiwada-buki* craft will work alongside younger people to pass on this and other traditional methods.

To prepare for the start of construction work, the spirit of Tenjin was relocated from the main sanctuary to a temporary hall (*kariden*). Major renovations necessitate a *kariden* out of consideration for the deity, who needs a proper dwelling in the interim. Also, workers cannot enter the sacred space where he resides. The transfer of Tenjin's spirit was performed at night, and priests obscured the route with curtains so that Tenjin could move in privacy between the buildings. Priests also removed the many treasures of the *honden*—objects dedicated to Tenjin over the centuries—to inspect them and perform repairs.

The work is scheduled to be completed in 2026, in advance of the upcoming festival known as the “Anniversary of Sugawara Michizane Grand Ceremony of Dazaifu Tenmangū.” This celebration is held at 25-year intervals in accordance with the number’s religious significance: Michizane’s birth and death both occurred on the twenty-fifth day of the month in the old lunar calendar. The Grand Ceremony, held to pray for the rejuvenation of Tenjin’s divine power, is Dazaifu Tenmangū’s most important ritual event.