

The Role of Saigandenji Temple

Saigandenji Temple has played an important role in the life of the Aso region for well over 1,000 years. Even now, every morning, the chief monk of the main Saigandenji branch in the city of Aso ascends the mountain to chant sutras for the temple's principal object of worship, the Eleven-faced Kannon.

The purpose of this ritual is to prevent Mt. Aso from erupting. The smoke and ash the volcano spews into the sky damage the rice in the paddies, harm the cows grazing on the hillsides, and pollute the drinking water.

In addition, the chief priest entreats Kannon to answer the prayers of visitors to the temple. These prayers are **written on** the cloth strips hanging in bunches at the temple entrance. Each color represents a different theme: white to ward off danger, yellow for prosperity in business, green for passing examinations, purple for recovery from sickness, and red for luck in love.

One unique ritual that survives at the main temple of Saigandenji in Aso City is fire walking (*hiwatari-shinji*). Every spring, the temple monks walk across a flaming pathway several meters long consisting of the burning embers of branches and *goma-gi*, flat pieces of wood inscribed with prayers.