

## **Kikōji's Main Hall, Amida Buddha Statue, and Southern Gate**

Two of Kikōji Temple's most significant treasures are its main hall (*hondō*) and the wooden statue of Amida Buddha (Amitābha) housed within it.

Both are Important Cultural Properties.

The current main hall was built in 1544. The original hall, which dated to the 700s, had been destroyed 45 years earlier, during a century-long period of countrywide upheaval. The hall is notable for its resemblance and possible connection to the Great Buddha Hall at Tōdaiji, one of Nara's most renowned temples. Kikōji's founder, a Buddhist priest named Gyōki, was closely involved in the creation of Tōdaiji. According to temple lore, Kikōji's original main hall functioned as a prototype for Tōdaiji's Great Buddha Hall.

The temple's principal image of veneration is a wooden statue of Amida Buddha that dates to the Heian period (794–1185). Its gentle expression

and flowing garments reflect the style of Jōchō (d. 1057), a famous sculptor of that period. Even seated, the statue is 2.33 meters tall, keeping with the canonically established height of a buddha. The temple's image of Amida Buddha is flanked by statues of Amida's two bodhisattva attendants, Kannon Bosatsu and Seishi Bosatsu.

### **Southern Gate (Nandaimon)**

Like the main hall, the temple's original southern gate was destroyed in the 1570s. The gate was finally reconstructed in 2010 with funds raised

through the temple's promotion of sutra-copying (*shakyō*). The bays on either side of the 12-meter gate are occupied by statues of two Niō guardians created by celebrated sculptor Nakamura Shinya (b. 1926). They are thought to purify the hearts of those who pass through the gate.