



Japan's First World Cultural Heritage

Hōryūji

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(ENGLISH)

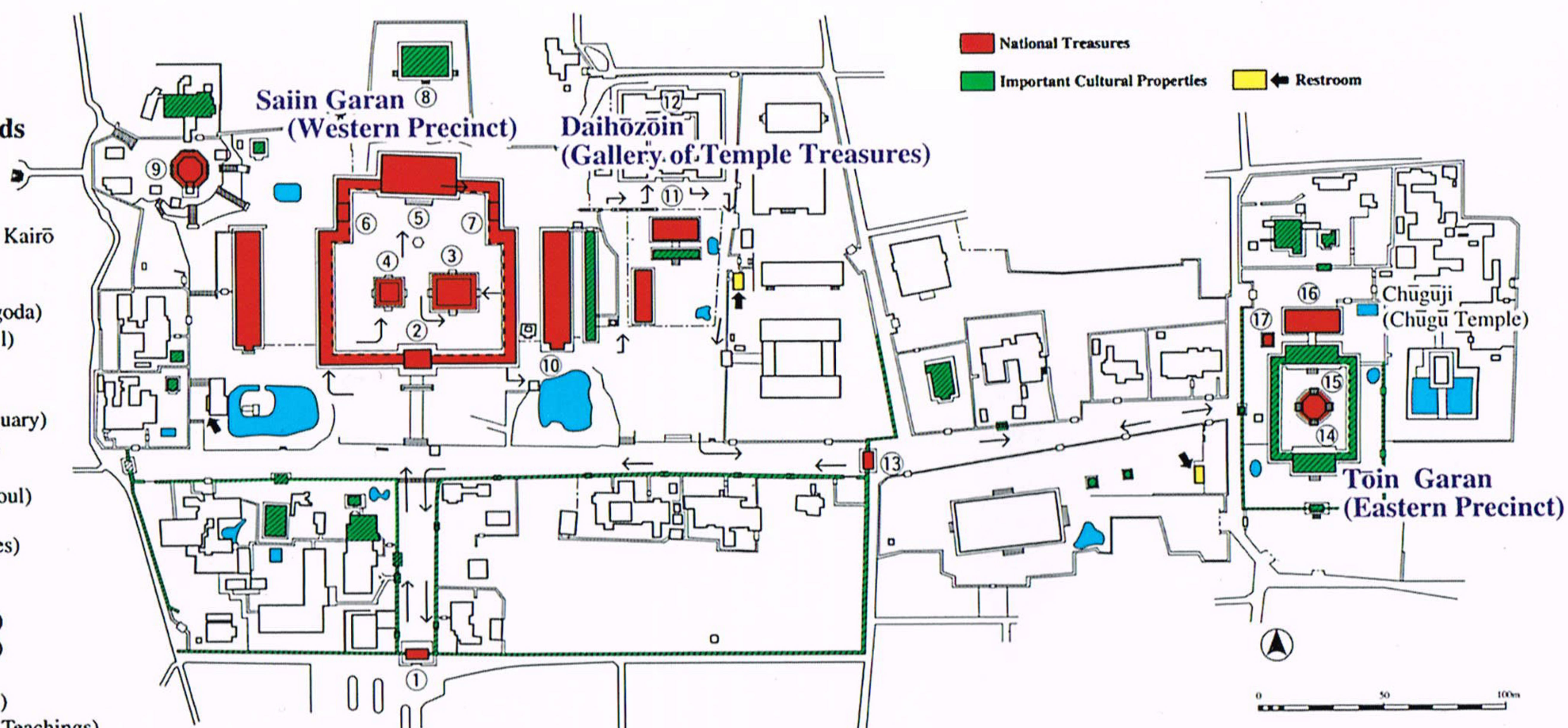
Map of Hōryūji Grounds

- ① Nandaimon (South Main Gate)
- ② Chūmon (Central Gate) and Kairō (Cloister-Gallery)
- ③ Kondō (Main Hall)
- ④ Gojū-no-Tō (Five-Story Pagoda)
- ⑤ Daikōdō (Great Lecture Hall)
- ⑥ Kyōzō (Sutra Repository)
- ⑦ Shōrō (Bell House)
- ⑧ Kami-no-Midō (Inner Sanctuary)
- ⑨ Saiendō (West Round Hall)
- ⑩ Shōryōin (Hall of Prince Shōtoku's Soul)
- ⑪ Daihōzōin (Gallery of Temple Treasures)
- ⑫ Kudara Kannondō (The Kudara Kannon Hall)
- ⑬ Tōdaimon (East Main Gate)
- ⑭ Yumedono (Hall of Visions)
- ⑮ Shariden (Reliquary Hall) and Eden (Hall of Paintings)
- ⑯ Denpōdō (Hall of Buddhist Teachings)
- ⑰ Tōin Shōrō (Bell House of the Eastern Precinct)

● General Admission Hours
Feb. 22 - Nov. 3: 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Nov. 4 - Feb. 21: 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

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Western Precinct

Hōryū-ji: A Brief History

The grounds of Hōryū-ji (Hōryū Temple) house the world's oldest surviving wooden structures, conveying images of Japan as it existed more than 1,300 years ago, during the Asuka Period (A.D. mid 6th - beginning of 8th c.). The story of Hōryū-ji's founding can be discovered in the historical writings engraved on the back of the halo of the Yakushi Nyorai Buddha statue, located on the eastern side of the room in the temple's Main Hall, and in the official inventory of Hōryū-ji property holdings recorded in 747.

According to these records, the emperor Yōmei vowed to build a temple and an image of a Buddha as a form of prayer for his own recovery from illness—a vow he was never fated to fulfill, for he died shortly thereafter. These same writings state how Empress Suiko and Crown Prince Shōtoku fulfilled Emperor Yōmei's deathbed wish by building in 607 a temple and a statue of a Buddha, to which the temple was dedicated. The Buddha statue was of the Yakushi Nyorai (Bhaisajyaguru)—literally, “arrival as a healer”—and the temple was named the Ikaruga Temple (after the name of the location), or Hōryū-ji (“Temple of the Flourishing Law [of Buddhism]”).

On the fateful night of April 30 in the year 670, however, a great blaze swept through the temple grounds, leaving “not a single building” standing, as it is recorded in the ancient *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon Shoki*). However, historians in the latter part of the 19th century began to cast doubt on the accuracy of this account of Hōryū-ji's destruction and to question whether or not the fire truly did occur. Although there are many questions that remain unanswered to this day, one thing certain is that Hōryū-ji boasts an illustrious 14 centuries of continuous observance of tradition since established by Prince Shōtoku, the great statesman and founder of Buddhism in Japan.

Today, Hōryū-ji is composed of the Western Precinct (Saiin Garan), which is centered around the Five-Story Pagoda (Gojū-no-Tō) and the Main Hall (Kondō), and the Eastern Precinct (Tōin Garan), which is arranged around the Hall of Visions (Yumedono). Throughout the 187,000-square-meter grounds are irreplaceable cultural treasures, bequeathed across the centuries and continuing to preserve the essence of eras spanning the entire journey through Japanese history since the 7th century.

In fact, Hōryū-ji contains over 2,300 important cultural and historical structures and articles, including nearly 190 that have been designated as National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties. In December of 1993, Hōryū-ji, as a unique storehouse of world Buddhist culture, became the first treasure of any kind in Japan to be selected by UNESCO as part of the World Heritage.



Shaka Triad of the Main Hall

① Nandaimon (South Main Gate)

Muromachi Period: end of 14th - early 17th c.

The South Main Gate, restored in 1438, combines simple elegance with power and dignity, as befits its role as the main gateway into Hōryū-ji.

② Chūmon (Central Gate) and Kairō (Cloister-Gallery)

Asuka Period: mid 6th - beginning of 8th c.

Low, overhanging eaves of the Central Gate shade entablatures and ornamental railings that are supported by columns designed with entasis, all of which capture the essence of Asuka architecture. The mighty gate doors and Japan's oldest known clay guardian deities, or Kongō Rikishi (Nara Period: beginning of 8th - end of 8th c.), which tower on each side of the doorway, stand in imposing contrast to the delicate lattice windows of the Cloister-Gallery, which stretches out to the east and west and surrounds the pagoda and Main Hall in refined splendor. On the opposite side of the enclosure is the Great Lecture Hall (Daikōdō), flanked by the Bell House (Shōrō) on the east and the Sutra Repository (Kyōzō) on the west. This particular temple layout, the heart of the Western Precinct, is referred to as the Hōryū-ji Style.

③ Kondō (Main Hall)

Asuka Period: mid 6th - beginning of 8th c.

The Main Hall is the sacred edifice in which are enshrined statues to which Hōryū-ji is dedicated. Within this stately building stands a bronze Asuka-period Shaka (Sakyamuni) triad, made by the famous sculptor Tori, in honor of Prince Shōtoku; to the east of the triad is a bronze statue of a seated figure of the Yakushi Nyorai from the same period, built in honor of Emperor Yōmei, Prince Shōtoku's father; and to the west is a bronze statue of the seated image of the Amida Nyorai (Amitābha), or the Pure Land Buddha (Kamakura Period: late 12th - early 14th c.), built in honor of Empress Anahobe no Hashihito, Prince Shōtoku's mother. Warding evil away from these statues is Japan's oldest set of the four heavenly guardians, or Shitennō (Hakuhō Period: late 7th - beginning of 8th c.). These camphor-wood statues stand quietly atop defeated evil spirits, unlike the vigorous warriors they came to be represented as in later centuries.

Also housed within the Main Hall are the standing wooden images of Kichijōten (Srimahadevi), goddess of good fortune, and Bishamonten (Vaisravana), god of war, and national protector (both Heian Period: end of 8th - late 12th c.).

Heavenly beings fly with phoenixes along the eaves of the three ceiling-mounted canopies in a style reminiscent of the “lands west of China”—ancient Central-Asian lands from where trade routes stretched across the Asian continent and to Japan. On the surrounding walls are world-famous murals. Long known as the best extant pictures of ancient depictions of Buddhist paradise, much of these murals were destroyed by fire in 1949. Today, fully reconstructed, they vividly recall the beauty of the day they were created.

④ Gojū-no-Tō (Five-Story Pagoda)

Asuka Period: mid 6th - beginning of 8th c.

Pagodas are evolved forms of Indian stupas and are the most important structures in Buddhist temples, being where the relics of a Buddha are enshrined. Hōryūji's pagoda, standing 32.5 meters from its base, is the oldest five-storied pagoda in Japan. A collection of clay statues from the early Nara Period are located within the lowest level of its interior: On the east side, Yuimakoji (Vimalakirti) and Monju Bosatsu (Manjusri) are engaged in an exchange of Buddhist questions and answers; on the north side, Sakyamuni Buddha is passing into nirvana; on the west side, the Division of the Relics of Sakyamuni Buddha is taking place; and on the south side, Miroku Bosatsu (Maitreya), a future Buddha, is giving a lecture.

⑤ Daikōdō (Great Lecture Hall)

Heian Period: end of 8th - late 12th c.

This hall was originally built for monks to pursue their Buddhist studies and as a facility in which to conduct memorial services. Lightning struck the hall, as well as the Bell House, in 925, burning them both to the ground. The current lecture hall, the Yakushi triad (a Buddhist "triad" is a Buddha flanked by two attendants) to which the building is dedicated, and the four heavenly guardians were rebuilt in 990.

⑥ Kyōzō (Sutra Repository)

Nara Period: beginning of 8th - end of 8th c.

Originally constructed as a facility to store sutras, this building currently houses a Heian-period seated image of Kanroku Sōjō, the scholarly monk from the early-4th-to-mid-7th-century Korean kingdom of Paekche, who was the first to convey the disciplines of astronomy and geography to Japan.

⑦ Shōrō (Bell House)

Heian Period: end of 8th - late of 12th c.

The Hakuho-period bell that hangs in the Bell House echoes to this day with the sound of ancient Japan.

⑧ Kami-no-Midō (Inner Sanctuary)

Kamakura Period: late 12th - early 14th c.

This sanctuary is said to have been originally constructed during the 8th century, according to the wishes of Toneri Shinnō, crown prince under Emperor Tenmu. The current structure, however, was built during the Kamakura Period. Within the Inner Sanctuary is enshrined a Heian-period Sakyamuni triad, protected by a Muromachi-period set of four heavenly guardians.



Hall of Prince Shōtoku's Soul



Dream-Changing Kannon

Government-Sealed Repository (Kōfuzō) of the Heian Period. Heading northward just before you reach the Repository, you will see a new temple behind the buildings, such as the Nara Period Refectory (Jikidō) and the Kamakura Period Narrow Hall (Hosodono). This is the Gallery of Temple Treasures (Daihōzōin), completed in 1998, which has as its center the Kudara Kannon Hall. This structure is a rich repository of Japan's cultural heritage, preserving within its walls many priceless items, including the famous Yumechigai Kannon statue, or Dream-Changing Avalokitesvara statue (Hakuho Period); the Tamamushi Tabernacle, a Tabernacle with the iridescent colors of the tamamushi beetle (Asuka Period), which is said to have been the private property of Empress Suiko; the Lady Tachibana Tabernacle (Hakuho Period) which was dedicated to the bronze Amida triad sitting atop a lotus pond, and many other treasures, including a collection of Hyakuman Miniature Pagodas; the Nine-Headed Kannon, carved from sandalwood, brought from China; and a small mural of the Main Hall depicting heavenly beings. These treasures are the legacy of 1,400 years of worship at Hōryūji, which may be mentioned as valuable treasures that show the long history of Hōryūji.

⑫ Kudara Kannon dō (The Kudara Kannon Hall)

Heisei Period: 1998

The Kudara Kannon statue (Asuka Period) bequeathed to Hōryūji is world famous as a Buddhist statue representing Japan's Buddhist art. Further, the tall and slender well-proportioned figure, rare for a Japanese Buddhist statue, and its graceful and merciful expression have captivated many people. It has been Hōryūji's long and fervent desire to construct a Hall to enshrine the Kudara Kannon in peace. This dream was finally realized in autumn 1998, which is this Kudara Kannon Hall.

⑨ Saiendō (West Round Hall)

Kamakura Period: late 12th - early 14th c.

On a hill northwest of the walkway is the West Round Hall (actually octagonal), said to have originally been built by Gyōki Bosatsu at the request of Lady Tachibana in the 8th century. The current structure was built during the Kamakura Period and enshrines a seated image of the Yakushi Nyorai in its center. This Nara-period statue is one of the biggest dry-lacquer Buddhist images in Japan.

⑩ Shōryōin (Hall of Prince Shōtoku's Soul)

Kamakura Period: late 12th - early 14th c.

Two narrow buildings, the West Quarters (Nishi Muro) and the East Quarters (Higashi Muro) run north-south along the outside of the western and the eastern portions of the Cloister-Gallery. These structures are still called *sōbō*, or monks' dwellings, although monks no longer live there. The southern extreme of the East Quarters was converted into the Hall of Prince Shōtoku's Soul during the Kamakura Period, when the worship of Prince Shōtoku was at its peak, in order to enshrine a Heian-period statue of the prince.

⑪ Daihōzōin (Gallery of Temple Treasures)

Heisei Period: 1998

Walking eastward from the Hall of Prince Shōtoku's Soul (Shōryōin), there stands the



Tamamushi Tabernacle



Kudara Kannon

⑬ Tōdaimon (East Main Gate)

Nara Period: beginning of 8th - end of 8th c.
The East Main Gate stands between the Gallery of Temple Treasures in the Western Precinct and the Hall of Visions in the Eastern Precinct. The unusual triple ridge-beam construction of this gate, typical of Nara-period architecture, is easily viewed from below.

⑭ Yumedono (Hall of Visions)

Nara Period: beginning of 8th - end of 8th c.
The monk Gyōshin Sōzu constructed in 739 a temple called the Jōgūōin, or Jōgūō Temple—Jōgūō being another name for Prince Shōtoku—as a monument to the memory of the prince. He built this temple, the current Eastern Precinct, on the site where the Ikaruga Palace, which was built in 601, originally stood. The heart of the precinct is the Hall of Visions. Within this octagonal pavilion—the oldest of its kind in Japan—is enshrined the Kuse Kannon, or Avalokitesvara the Savior (Asuka Period), a life-size statue of Prince Shōtoku. Piously kept in its shrine throughout the centuries, this “Hidden Statue” has survived in a perfect state of preservation to this day, retaining even its original gilding. Around the statue stand various others, including the Heian-period Shō Kannon Bosatsu, or Sacred Avalokitesvara; a Kamakura-period statue depicting the filial piety of Prince Shōtoku; a Nara-period dry-lacquer statue of Gyōshin Sōzu, the monk who built the East Precinct; and a Heian-period clay image of Dōsen Risshi, the monk who supervised the repair of the Hall of Visions during the Heian Period. The Hall of Visions is enclosed by a cloister-gallery and the Kamakura-period Hall of Worship (Raidō), which was originally the Central Gate (Chūmon) of the

Eastern Precinct. Many people say that the Hall of Visions—a sanctuary erected to pray for the repose of the soul of Prince Shōtoku, who is said to have been a manifestation of the Kuse Kannon—is enveloped in a peculiar, mystical atmosphere.

⑮ Shariden (Reliquary Hall) and Eden (Hall of Paintings)

Kamakura Period: late 12th - early 14th c.
The Reliquary Hall houses the relics of a Buddha, which legend has sprang forth from the palms of two-year-old Prince Shōtoku as he joined his hands in prayer. The Hall of Paintings houses painted *shoji*, or sliding paper-doors, that depict the entire life of Prince Shōtoku.

⑯ Denpōdō (Hall of Buddhist Teachings)

Nara Period: beginning of 8th - end of 8th c.
The Hall of Buddhist Teachings was originally the private residence of Tachibana no Konakachi, wife of Emperor Shōmu, and was brought to the temple and converted into a Buddhist hall. This unusual event has bequeathed to researchers today an invaluable piece of ancient Japanese residential architecture. The structure houses various Buddhist statues, including three sets of Nara-period dry-lacquer Amida triads on a long altar.

⑰ Tōin Shōrō (Bell House of the Eastern Precinct)

Kamakura Period: late 12th - early 14th c.
The Bell House of the Eastern Precinct is constructed in a trapezoidal form known as *hakamagoshi* (spreading skirt). Within it hangs a Nara-period bell that has the words “Chūgūji” (Chūgū Temple) engraved on the inside, indicating that it has been in the possession of at least one other temple over its more than 1,000-year existence.

Note: Architectural structures built during either the Asuka or Hakuho periods are considered as Asuka-period architecture in this brochure.



Hall of Visions

MAIN ANNUAL EVENTS (Buddhist Events)

Shari-kō (at Tōin shariden <East Reliquary Hall>)	January 1 - 3
Kondō Shushō-e	January 7 - 14
Jōgūōin Shushō-e (at Yumedono <Hall of Visions>)	January 16 - 18
Saiendō Shuni-e	February 1 - 3
Saiendō Tsuinashiki	February 3
Sanzō-e (at Sangyōin)	February 5
Nehan-e (at Daikōdō <Great Lecture Hall>) (Memorial service to be held on the anniversary of the death of Buddha. The day when the Buddha passed away.)	February 15
Oeshiki Taiya Hōyō (At Shōryōin)	March 21
Oeshiki (At Shōryōin) (Memorial service to be held on the anniversary of the death of Prince Shōtoku.)	March 22 - 24
Busshō-e (At Jikidō <Refectory>) (Memorial service to be held on the birthday of Buddha.)	April 8
Geango (At Nishi Muro <The West Room>)	May 16 - August 15
Benten-e (At the Benten Shrine)	July 7
Tōin Jizō-e (At Denpōdō)	July 24
Urabon-e (At Ritsugakuin)	August 14 - 15
Jion-e (At Daikōdō <Great Lecture Hall>)	November 13
Shōman-e (At Daikōdō <Great Lecture Hall>)	November 15
Yumedono Honzon Tokubetsu Kaihi (Special spring opening of Yumedono to allow worship of the Honzon.) (Special autumn opening of Yumedono to allow worship of the Honzon.)	April 11 - May 18 October 22 - November 22