

Toyokawa Inari

The History of This Temple

This temple, popularly known as "Toyokawa Inari" is a well-known Sôtô Zen temple named Toyokawa Kaku Myôgonji. It was founded on November 22, 1441 (Kakitsu 1) by Zen priest Tôkai Gieki. The main figures enshrined are the Thousand-Armed Kannon Bodhisattva transmitted by Priest Kangan Giin, and the protective deity of the temple (seen in a vision and carved by Priest Kangan), Dakini Shinten. This deity is the reason this temple is so widely known as Toyokawa Inari.

Kangan Giin was a famous disciple of Dôgen, the founder of the Soto Zen sect and Eihei-ji Temple. The third son of the eighty-fourth emperor, Juntoku, he made a great vow to bring salvation to his times, and went to China for intensive Buddhist study. Tôkai Gieki (the founder of this temple) was the sixth disciple of Kangan.

Kangan's vision of Dakini Shinten was about 700 years ago. In 1264 (Bun'ei 1) he went to China to study Buddhism, and in 1267, on his return to Japan, he beheld a wonderful appearance: a vision of a deity seated upon a white fox, carrying rice, and bearing a wish-fulfilling jewel in one hand. The figure recited a mystical formula: "On shi ra bat ta ni ri un so wa ka." The meaning of these syllables is, "When this spell is chanted, the faith in me reaches everywhere, and by the true power of the Buddhist precepts, evil and misfortune will be abolished and luck and wisdom attained; suffering removed and comfort achieved, and pain transformed into delight." This experience moved Kangan deeply, and when he returned to Japan,

he carved an image of the form he had seen and worshipped it as a protective deity. It was transmitted over the generations, and enshrined and worshipped here at the founding of this temple, Myôgonji. Since that time there have been many miraculous occurrences, and today Dakiniten is worshipped widely as a deity of happiness and prosperity who averts suffering and brings relief.

Among the many believers whose deep faith laid the foundation for the revival of this temple are Imagawa Yoshimoto (1519-60, general), Oda Nobunaga (1534-82, general), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598, general), Kuki Yoshitaka (1542-1600, general), Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616, first Edo shogun), Ooka Tadasuke (1677-1751, mid-Edo shogunate official), Watanabe Kazan (1793-1841, painter), Imperial Prince Arisugawa no Miya Taruhito (1835-95). The prince donated a framed sign in his own calligraphy of the words "Toyokawa Temple." The branch temple in Tokyo's Akasaka called "Toyokawa Inari Betsuin" enshrines the statue of Dakiniten which was worshipped throughout his life by Ooka Echizen, the famous Edo period magistrate, as his protective deity.

The grounds of the temple comprise about 34,5000 tsubo and include the Somon Gate, Sanmon Gate, Hattô (main worship hall), Honden (hall where Dakiniten is worshipped), Okunoin (inner sanctuary), Hounden (memorial hall), Shôrôdô (bell tower), guest rooms, kitchens, Mandô (meditation hall), Daikoku Ten Hall, Kobo Daishi Hall, Keiunmon Gate, and Horakuden (stage). there are around one hundred buildings in all within, this temple complex, which has become the sacred spot for the

worship of many millions of believers throughout Japan. In addition, there are branch temples in Tokyo, Osaka, Yokosuka, Sapporo, Fukuoka, and Shizuoka (Senzu), and divided spirits of the deity (bunrei) are worshipped privately, throughout the country.

Toyokawa Kaku Sômon (豊川閣総門)

The main gate of this temple was rebuilt in 1656 (Meireki 2) about 210 years after it was first erected. The present structure was completed on April 10, 1884 (Meiji 17). It is an imposing gate, built entirely of zelkova wood with a shingled copper roof. Particularly interesting are the two gate doors made of single zelkova boards with unusual fish-scale grain.

Toyokawa Inari Honden (豊川稲荷本殿)

This building enshrines the Dakini Shinten statue carved by priest kangan after his vision. In 1894 (Meiji 27) the 29th head priest of this temple, Fukuyama Mokudo, started the rebuilding project, and the groundbreaking took place in 1908. Building stretched over the Meiji, Taisho, and Shôwa periods, and finally was completed in the spring of 1930 (Shôwa 5). It is built entirely of zelkova wood, with a two-tiered peaked roof over three bays. The building is about 20 meters wide, 40 meters deep, and 30 meters high. There are 72 round pillars ranging from 54 centimeters to 1 meter in diameter. It is a magnificent palatial building, unparalleled in modern architecture.

Ryûgansho (Reception) (立願所)

This is the reception office for prayer services (gokitô) for the fulfillment of various desires including household safety, business prosperity, traffic safety, academic success, and good health. People also apply here to spend the night in the temple, and attend the prayer service early the following morning. Many people do this monthly : purification by staying at the temple and eating Buddhist vegetarian food, followed by a prayer service.

Saishôden (Great Hall) (最祥殿)

This is the largest room at the temple, used for lectures on Buddhism and for serving food to the believers. When the eleven room partitions are removed, This becomes a 400-mat room, and can hold worship or travel groups of 1000. In front of the room facing the great entrance hall is a pine board hallway, over which hangs framed calligraphy in the hand of Priest Mokudo which says, "This place is the most auspicious."

Tsûtenro (通天廊)

This elevated hallway extends from the Hattô to the Honden. It was completed in 1930 (Shôwa 5) . Over four meters wide and two-hundred meters long, the ceiling is constructed on camphor and the remainder of katsura (cinnamon tree).

Part of the passage is a "nightingale floor" (the boards are designed to emit a singing sound when walked on), and this place is treasured by the believers who come to worship here.

Interior of the Honden (本殿内部)

The sanctuary (naijin) is divided into three areas : the inner sanctuary, the ritual area, and worshippers' seating.

In the main sanctuary are images of Toyokawa Dakini Shinten, the Bodhisattva Jizo, Bishamonten, and other bodhisattava statues.

The middle area is called the Hannyaden and is where the priests chant the Great Wisdom Sutra, pray for permanent world peace, and conduct prayer services for believers.

The Seshuden is where believers pray. Above their heads in the center of the front part of the wall is the plaque with the temple's name inscribed by Imperial Prince Arisugawa no Miya Taruhito.

Great Autumn Festival

(Enshrinement Festival) (秋の大祭)

This festival includes a large sacred palanquin and procession of divine children, and is well known as a lantern festival which many come to see. Within the temple grounds two large paper lanterns (5 meters in diameter, 10 meters in length) and countless smaller lanterns are hung and 1 it. The candles inside the large lanterns are a meter high, 35 centimeters thick, and weigh 50 kilograms each.

The Approach to the Okunoin (奥の院参道)

The path from the Honden to the inner temple is lined on both sides with a thousand prayer flags, and among the trees are other temple buildings including the Hôunden, three-storied pagoda, Meditation Hall, Kôbo Hall, and Daikokuten Hall.

Hôunden (宝雲殿)

Enshrined here are Sakyamuni Buddha and the Thirteen Buddhas. The hall is used for Buddhist memorial services and behind the altar in the Ihaido are the memorial tablets of members of the parish and believers.

Daikokuten Dô (大黒天堂)

This hall, built in traditional storehouse style, enshrines Daikokuten. It is said that if one rubs the stone statues of Daikokuten in front of the building, it will bring good luck.

Okunoin (奥の院)

Situated in the deep interior of the luxuriant temple forest are three buildings : the Naiden, Shindenmon, and Haiden.

The Naiden and Haiden were both the old central worship hall built in 1814 (Bunka 11). The Shindenmon was the "Chûjakumon" of the old Okunoin, and was built in 1858 (Ansei 5). These buildings were moved to their present site as the Okunoin in 1930 when the Honden was rebuilt.

First Worship of the New Year (初詣の風景)

At the New Year, millions of believers from all over Japan come here to pray for peace and happiness. On January first, when the main gate is opened, the grounds are packed with good women and men waiting to greet the new year.

Hattô (法堂)

This is the main worship hall of Toyokawa Myogonji. The Zen sect uses the term "Hattô" (Dharma Hall) rather than "Hondo" (Main Hall). Enshrined here is the statue of the Thousand-Armed Bodhisattva Kannon which was transmitted by Priest Kangen Giin when he returned from China. It is a practice hall used for important Buddhist services, three daily offering services and other rituals.

This hall was completed in the spring of 1813 (Bunka 10) and rebuilt in the Tempô Period (1830s). It has a two-tiered tiled roof and has a length of 24 meters and a depth of 20 meters.

The Garden of Myogonji (妙蔵寺庭園)

This garden was constructed in the early Edo period and became a Designated Garden of Japan in 1941 (Showa 16). It covers about 370 tsubo and represents Mikasa Mountain in Nara with a dry waterfall against a background of old trees. In the pond at the foot of the mountain swim turtles and carp. The cycads, azaleas, peonys, camilias and other flowers on this miniature mountain compete in splendor in all four seasons, and believers greatly enjoy visiting this famous garden.

Important Yearly Events

January 1-15	First Worship of the New Year
Second lunar month; first day of the horse	Hatsuuma (First Horse Day Festival)
May 4-5	Spring Festival (Prayers for a Fruitful Year)
August 7-8	Festival of Souls (Bon Odori Dance)
November 22-23	Fall Festival (Enshrinement Festival)
Every month, 22	Monthly Festival (Anniversary of Temple Founding)

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