

Daihikaku Senkōji Temple

大悲閣千光寺

Daihikaku Senkōji Temple is located on the northeastern side of Mt. Arashiyama, overlooking the Hozu River. To reach the temple, visitors must climb 200 stone steps from the riverbank below. The reception hall by the temple's entrance commands a dramatic view of Kyoto and the surrounding mountains.



Originally a part of Seiryōji Temple, Senkōji was taken apart and rebuilt in its current location at the request of a merchant named Suminokura Ryōi (1554–1614). The Suminokura family had worked as physicians and moneylenders for generations, but Ryōi instead pursued a career in exports, and he made a fortune through trade with Annam and Tonkin (in what is now Vietnam). By 1606, Ryōi had gained tremendous wealth from these ventures, and he used that money to build canals and develop natural waterways like the Hozu River. At the end of his life, Ryōi retired to the newly rebuilt Senkōji Temple, which he dedicated to those who had lost their lives working on his construction projects. Within the temple grounds is the main hall, which enshrines an image of the bodhisattva Kannon next to a statue of Ryōi, who is depicted in a monk's robes surrounded by the tools of his trade.

The temple grounds also feature two stone monuments with engravings of haiku written by Bashō (1644–1694). The first poem, located at the bottom of the stone stairs, reads:

*hana no yama
nichō noboreba
daihikaku*

(The flowered mountains
and, arriving at the top
the temple of mercy)



The second poem, located halfway up the stone walkway, reads:

*rokugatsu ya
mine nikumo oku
arashiyama*

(At the peak of June
clouds resting on the peak of
Arashiyama)



Math, Poetry, and Ryōi's Legacy at Daihikaku Senkōji Temple



In 1614, Daihikaku Senkōji was established as a temple of the Tendai sect by a monk from Nison-in Temple, also in Kyoto. Senkōji, as the temple is popularly known, was originally part of a different temple complex until it was moved to its current location by Kyoto merchant Suminokura Ryōi (1554–1614). The principal image at the temple is Ryōi's personal statue of the Thousand-Armed Kannon, said to be the work of the tenth-century monk Genshin (942–1017). In 1808, Senkōji underwent another renovation, this time funded by one of Ryōi's descendants, and it was reestablished under the Ōbaku sect. Today, the Buddhist temple is considered nonsectarian, and the lectures given by its head abbot incorporate multiple Zen traditions.

Daihikaku Senkōji has a unique connection to the abacus, a tool used to keep track of numbers when performing calculations. The abacus was brought to Japan from China at the beginning of the Muromachi period (1392–1573), but it was not widely used until Yoshida Mitsuyoshi (1598–1672), a relative of the Suminokura family, published a book on mathematics in 1627. Entitled *Jinkōki*, meaning “treatise on numbers great and small,” Mitsuyoshi's book gave clear instructions on how to use an abacus to solve everyday problems, such as making change, and it subsequently became the most popular book on mathematics during the Edo period (1603–1867).



In 2013, the head abbot of Senkōji wrote a number of sermons connecting the abacus to Buddhist theory. That same year, the temple received a 1.1-meter-tall model of a three-story pagoda made entirely of abacuses. Senkōji is sometimes referred to as Abacus Temple (Sorobanji).



[Address]
62 Arashiyama Nakaoshita-Cho, Nishikyo-Ku, Kyoto

[Entrance Fees]
400 yen

[Open Hours]
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
open year round

[Access]
30-minute walk from Arashiyama Station on the Hankyu Railway
40-minute walk from Saga-Arashiyama Station on the JR Railway

[Website]
<http://daihikaku.jp/wp/daihikaku-e/>



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この英語解説文は観光庁の地域観光資源の多言語解説整備支援事業で作成しました。
This English-language text was created by the Japan Tourism Agency.