

Dr. Erwin von Baelz, at the age of 27, was invited from Germany in 1876 to the Medical College of Tokyo Imperial University. He taught for the next 29 years, contributing greatly to the modernization of Japan's medical education. His wife, Hana, born to the established Toda family in Goyu, is known to have been a faithful wife supporting her husband in various ways.

In 1905 Baelz returned to Germany with Hana and died there in 1913. He was 64 years old.

After the death of her husband, Hana returned to Japan and lived in Tokyo. In 1930 she erected a memorial pagoda in the precincts of this temple, where her ancestors were also buried, to remember her husband and pray for the repose of his soul. She died at the age of 74 at Tokyo University Hospital in 1937.

By the pagoda is a tombstone engraved with the names of three grandsons who died in World War II as well as other family members. There is also a stone monument bearing a haiku poem by Mizuhara Shuoushi. The poem admires Dr. Baelz's achievements as follows:

In the country

With the fragrance of chrysanthemums
Immortalized as a great doctor

4. Buildings and Gardens

Going through the main gate painted in vermilion, a visitor will see the main hall with a half-hipped roof in front of you and dormitories for priests on the left. On the right are a warehouse, the entrance hall, a study room, a guest room, Entsu-kaku pavillion and the belfry. This architecture is reminiscent of the grandeur of old days when the temple, complete with seven major buildings, was thronged with ascetic monks.

In the rear of the main hall is a sprawling landscape garden in the go-round style, which incorporates the majestic view of Mt. Daihozan as borrowed scenery in the backdrop. Rich green vegetation of the mountain is reflected in the water of the lake which calmly sits in the middle of thick green moss, creating a tranquil atmosphere. Walking up to the end of the garden, you will find a stone monument on which a haiku poem by Ota Koson is carved. It reads:

Under the moon

A flying squirrel glides from tree to tree,
Prompting the spirits to fly around

Main garden



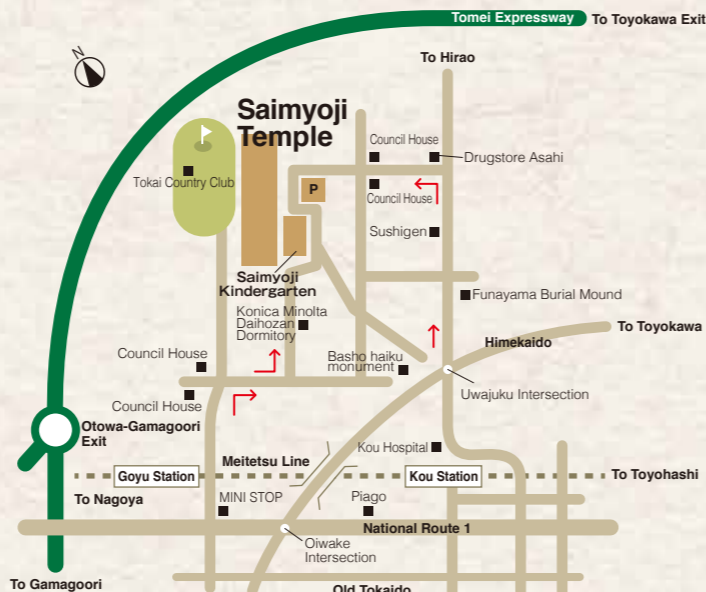
Annual Events

January 1 The New Year Ceremony

April 29 Aizen Myo'o Festival

Access

- Change trains at JR Toyohashi Station and get off at Kou Station on the Meitetsu Line. It's a 10-minute walk from the east exit of the station.
- A 10-minute drive from the Otowa-Gamagoori Exit of the Tomei Expressway along National Highway No. 1 going toward Toyohashi



Main gate



大寶山 西明寺
Daihozan Saimyoji Temple

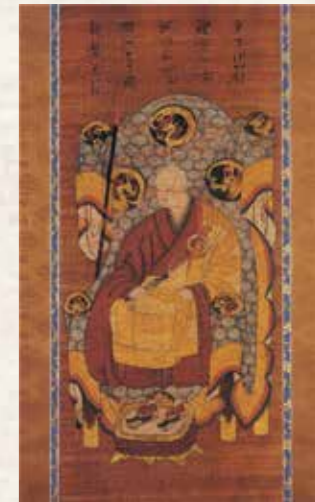
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1. History

Back in the Heian period, during the reign of Emperor Ichijo, this area, then known as Mikawa Province, was governed by Oe no Sadamoto. He realized the impermanence of all things after the death of his beloved concubine, the Honorable Consort Rikuju, and became a Buddhist monk. He changed his name to Jakusho and lived in a small thatched hut built on the hill east of Mt. Daihozan during the Chotoku era (995-998). He called it Rokkoji Temple of the Tendai sect of Buddhism, which is said to have been the origin of the current Saimyoji Temple.

In 1260, Hojo Tokiyori, who entered the Buddhist priesthood while still being the regent of the Kamakura Shogunate, visited this area during his nationwide pilgrimage tour. He restored then-neglected Rokkoji Temple and renamed it Saimyoji Temple of the Rinzaï sect. It is believed that, upon the restoration he dedicated a stupa and enshrined a statue of Acala (a fierce, angry-faced guardian deity) in the precincts.

For the next 200 years, the temple followed a course of decline as the country grappled with endless social unrest and fighting. In 1489, during the Muromachi period, this area fell under the jurisdiction of Suruga Province. Governor Mizuno, determined to restore Saimyoji Temple to its former glory, invited Priest Taiso Shojun from Kenkon in Temple in what is currently known as Higashiura-cho, Aichi Prefecture. Realigned as a subordinating temple of Kenkon in of the Soto sect, Saimyoji Temple regained its lost glory under Priest Shojun, who is now recognized as the founder of this temple.



An image of Great Priest Taiso Shojun, the Founder of Saimyoji

2. Relics

● Shuinjo (Red-stamped document of permission)

In 1564 during the late Muromachi period, when the Tokugawa clan clashed with the forces of the Imagawa clan at Sagisaka at the western foot of Mt. Daihozan, the fourth abbot of Saimyoji Temple, Priest Kaio Ryuki, ordered his disciples to prepare rice porridge and take it to the Tokugawa force's camp to feed the warriors.

The victorious Tokugawa Ieyasu visited Saimyoji Temple on that night and prayed for his continued luck in war with the support of Amitabha, whose statue was enshrined in the temple as its principal image. As an acknowledgement of the noble deed, Ieyasu invited the sixth abbot of the temple, Priest Denshi Zenju, to Fushimi Castle in 1603, and handed him a Shuinjo, which stipulated that the temple would be awarded with a piece of land worth an annual rice production of 20 koku. Ieyasu at the same time advised him to change the name of the temple so that it would include the kanji character meaning "west," in commemoration of the incident that connected the temple with the Tokugawa clan. The temple's name written in kanji characters was so changed but the pronunciation stayed the same as before.

● Close relations with the Mizuno family

This temple had its main hall and other buildings destroyed in a 1669 fire under the 10th abbot, Priest Hyakusu Gyukun. To rebuild the lost buildings, Okazaki Castle Castellan Mizuno Kemmotsu-Tadayoshi and local deputy official Suzuki Hachiemon offered a great amount of help. Thanks to their support, the temple celebrated its reconstruction in March 1671 with a solemn but magnificent ceremony.

Close relations with the Mizuno family had been maintained since Governor Mizuno invited Priest Taiso Shojun from Kenkon'in Temple, where the family had ancestral graves for generations. The ties between Mizuno Kemmotsu-Tadayoshi and Priest Hyakushu Gyukun were particularly strong, which can be assumed by various documents stored at the temple. The more than 40 letters stored here include a letter of sympathy for the damage from fire with a list of monetary contributions from Mizuno and a thank-you letter from the priest for the present of hand-made tobacco.

● Graves of key figures

In the eastern part of the temple's precincts at the foot of a hill there are three five-wheel pagodas (gorin-no-to in Japanese), which are said to be part of the remnants of Rokkoji Temple. Also in the precincts are the graves of Oe no Sadamoto, Hojo Tokiyori and Governor Mizuno, the three key figures involved in the foundation and development of the temple. They receive great respect for their achievements even today.

The temple also houses a grave which is believed to be that of Yamamoto Kansuke-Haruyuki, a legendary military strategist who served Takeda Shingen. He is said to have been from Ushikubo, in what is currently Toyokawa City. He enabled Takeda Shingen to beat his enemies in numerous battles with his ingenious strategies before he died during the fourth battle of Kawanaka-jima on September 10, 1561. The gravestone is said to have been erected here by a descendant of Yamamoto's elder brother who then lived in Kusakabe Village, in what is currently known as Toyotsucho, Toyokawa City, to console the soul of his esteemed ancestor.

Another grave of note is that of Beiringe Saiji, a haiku poet who erected a stone monument engraved with one of Basho's haiku poems to commemorate the 50th death anniversary of the great poet. It is located near the entrance of the graveyard at the back of Saimyoji Kindergarten.



最明寺殿真藏道崇大居士・勅特賜圓通大師六光寺殿寂照法師・長壽院殿乾徳慧剛大居士
Gravestones of Hojo Tokiyori, Oe no Sadamoto and Governor Mizuno, respectively, from left



3. Principal image and other Buddhist statues

● Principal image

Our principal image is a sitting Amitabha with his hands placed in the basic mudra. It is said to have been carved by Buddhist image sculptor An'ami. The statue was designated as a cultural property by the Toyokawa municipal government in November 1972.

Amitabha, also called the Buddha of Infinite Light or the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, is believed to still live in the Pure Land in the West and save the people for eternity with his 48 vows and with his great love and mercy.

Because Amitabha is so merciful that he promises people who chant the mantra in the prayer will go to the Pure Land after death, people of all social backgrounds believe in him.

A sitting Amitabha statue, the principal image of this temple



The main hall, completed in October 1996



● Aizen Myo'o

Legend has it that Oe no Sadamoto always kept this small statue of Ragaraja close at hand, but after the death of his Honorable Consort Rikuju, he had it enshrined by Aizen Pond to pray for the repose of her soul.

Ragaraja, or Aizen Myo'o in Japanese, is known to transform worldly lust into spiritual awakening, and teaches that earthly desires are a pure aspiration for enlightenment.

Pious men and women worship Aizen Myo'o as a deity to bring them a happy and prosperous married life and an abundant harvest. Every April the Aizen Myo'o Festival is held here. The temple also enshrines a painted image of Ragaraja as one of its treasures.



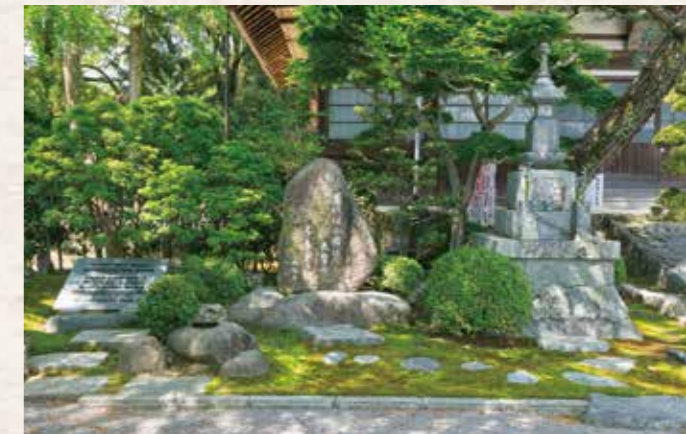
Aizen Myo'o

● Fudo Myo'o

This statue of Acala is believed to be the one that was placed at the Fudozaka slope of Mt. Daihozan when Hojo Tokiyori restored the neglected Rokkoji Temple as Saimyoji Temple.

Acala, or Fudo Myo'o in Japanese, is said to be a servant of Buddha, who thus also protects the practitioners of austerities and aids them toward enlightenment. It is believed that his expression of extreme wrath destroys earthly desires, holds off hateful enemies and protects people from all evil. Acala became an idol of worship in its own right in Japan, where people believe in its miraculous power.

● Memorial Pagoda for Dr. Baelz



Memorial Pagoda for Dr. Baelz, right

Memorial Pagoda for Dr. Baelz, a benefactor of medical education in Japan, stands in the front garden of the main hall with a gravestone for his family members nearby.