

## 【Baiō-ji Temple】

Baiō-ji Temple was founded in 1688 and is part of the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism, which was brought to Japan from China around 800 years ago. The practice of Zen meditation, or *zazen*, is central to the Sōtō school. The goal of *zazen* is to achieve a state of nothingness, or *mu*, by bringing the body, breath, and mind into harmony. The practice is often performed while seated in a cross-legged posture, but it is also possible to meditate while walking and moving. Sōtō is one of only three Japanese Buddhist schools, or sects, that practice *zazen*.

In the temple's main sanctuary, the central image is of Yakushi Nyorai, the Medicine Buddha, who is flanked by the Bodhisattva of Sunlight (*nikkōbosatsu*) and the Bodhisattva of Moonlight (*gakkōbosatsu*).

In the courtyard is a statue of Jizō, a compassionate deity who is known as a guardian of children and travelers. Statues of Jizō are a common sight and often depict him with a monk's shaved head and closed, upturned eyes. This atypical representation is called the "Hale and Hearty" Jizō (*pinshan jizō*), who sits with a foot soaking in hot spring waters. Jizō is believed to take ailments, injuries, and maladies on himself so that people may live long, healthy lives. Per the tradition, visitors with health concerns dip a cloth into the spring and touch it to the corresponding area on the statue.

The main festival celebrated at Baiō-ji Temple is the Flower Festival (*hana matsuri*), which marks the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha. According to legend, when the Buddha was born, he immediately walked seven steps, pointed to the heavens, and was baptized by a pure rain. The festival recreates that event by having visitors pour sweet tea over his statue. In other areas of Japan, the Flower Festival is typically held on April 8, but at Baiō-ji Temple it takes place on May 8 to coincide with a regional festival celebrating the discovery of hot spring waters.

