Byodoji Temple, listed as the 22nd temple on the 88-temple Shikoku pilgrimage route, was reportedly established in 814 by Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi), the founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism. Kukai was one of Japan's most influential priests.

Since 814, the temple burned down several times and was rebuilt. The temple's name translates as "temple of equality," reflecting its reputation for healing sick and injured people of all social classes. People have traveled to the temple for spiritual and physical healing since its establishment.

According to legend, Kukai dug a well on the temple grounds, and the water from this well is said to possess healing powers. The Main Hall (Hondo) houses a statue of Yakushi Nyorai, a deity of medicine and healing (also called the Medicine Buddha). Kukai is believed to have carved the statue after experiencing a vision of the deity.

Byodoji Temple has a reputation for healing illnesses and injuries, especially leg and back problems, though visitors must first climb a long, steep staircase to reach the Main Hall. To assist those who are unable to physically enter the temple grounds, the temple has two rare features.

The first feature is long strings that have been tied to the main hall and to the statue of Yakushi Nyorai. Colorful streamers attached to these strings extend to the gate at the temple entrance so individuals with limited mobility can touch them and pray to the healing deities.

The second feature is an online streaming service created by the head priest of Byodoji. It allows people around the world to pay a virtual visit to the temple at any time, enabling them to view the sacred objects and pray.

There are many stories of people with physical, mental, and emotional ailments having been healed after visiting the temple. One story concerns a man who could neither stand nor walk. He arrived one evening in a wagon pulled and pushed by two assistants. While he was sleeping in the wagon, a strong earthquake struck. The man jumped out of the wagon and realized he was standing and could walk.

Another story tells of a young girl who lived at a considerable distance from the temple and suffered from various ailments. One day, she disappeared; people searched everywhere for her until she was found sitting in the Byodoji Temple grounds. Her hair was wet with water from Reisui, a sacred well that legends say was dug by Kukai, and she had been cured of her ailments.

The Main Hall and other wooden buildings, as well as ancient sculptures of Buddhist figures, are spread out among the extensive, verdant temple grounds. The grounds rise from the temple gate up a steep hill. The gate, which symbolically separates the outer world from the sacred temple grounds, is flanked by a pair of wooden guardian sculptures that are thought to resemble demons. The guardians protect the precincts from evil. There is also a belfry, where temple priests sound the bell during various ceremonies.

On the left side of the grounds, as you face the temple, stands a contemporary artwork resembling a bamboo wall roughly 12 meters long and 6 meters high. The piece is a mandala that a priest designed and built with the help of members of his parish and other volunteers. They cut holes into bamboo sections and strung these up to create patterns. Every night, the wall is lit up from behind. The light penetrating the holes in the bamboo wall displays a Buddhist mandala, a geometric arrangement of symbols that can express Buddhist philosophy, be incorporated into various ceremonies, and facilitate meditation.

Main Hall

Temple records show that Byodoji Temple's wooden Main Hall (Hondo) was built on a small, steep hill in 1777. The hall holds numerous cultural artifacts, some of which are rarely found in other temples. For instance, on display are *hakoguruma*, centuries-old boxlike wagons in which injured or ill individuals once sat to be carried. According to local stories, the occupants of these carts miraculously got up and walked away unaided.

The Main Hall is also where a wooden statue of Yakushi Nyorai, a deity of medicine and healing (also called the Medicine Buddha), is stored. The statue was reportedly carved in 818 by the founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism, Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi). A rope is attached to Yakushi Nyorai's hands. By touching one end of the rope and praying, visitors are said to receive the healing powers of the Medicine Buddha. The Main Hall also houses a number of other centuries-old statues.

Visitors can remove their shoes and walk inside the buildings for a closer look at the cultural artifacts on display. Internet-connected cameras enable people around the world to view the temple online in real time.

Reisui Spring

The water that emerges from this spring on the grounds of Byodoji Temple is considered sacred and is reputed to have healing powers. A local legend claims the renowned priest Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi), who founded the Shingon school of Buddhism, dug a well in search of a source of water, which was necessary to create purifying steam as part of the sacred *goma* fire ritual. This Buddhist ritual involves writing prayers on wooden tablets called *gomagi* before they are burned.

According to stories, Kukai found a source of sacred water and purified himself with it before spending 100 days training for the *goma* fire ritual.

The water is odorless and clear, and it is believed to heal physical, emotional, and mental ailments when drunk or applied to areas of the body. The water can be drunk, except on rainy days as rain causes sediment to enter the well.

This English-language text was created by the Japan Tourism Agency.