



Fifty Years Strong
Byodo-In Temple celebrates its big anniversary with a bon dance on Saturday
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Byodo-In Temple Celebrates 50 Years With Obon Festivities

BY PAIGE TAKEYA

In 1868, approximately 150 Japanese immigrants arrived in Hawai'i. They were among the first of their people to step foot in this strange new land, paving a path for, some 20 years later, hundreds of thousands to follow. Today, we know them as the Gannenmono.

One hundred years after their arrival, on June 7, 1968, Byodo-In Temple rose in Kaha'u as a tribute to their legacy.

"The owner had traveled to Japan and seen the Byodo-In Temple in Kyoto, Japan, and he just fell in love with it," says Dennis Boser Jr., area operations director – Pacific region for Valley of the Temples Memorial Park. "He had this vision to build this temple."

Land developer Paul Trousdale built Valley of the

Temples in 1963 (and was a contributing force behind the construction of Kahekili Highway), adding the half-size replica of Byodo-In afterward as an oasis in the midst of the cemetery, where it serves as a nondenominational columbarium.

The only fundamental difference, aside from size, is that Hawai'i's Byodo-In is made of cement instead of wood, to better survive the climate.

Fifty years later, Byodo-In remains unchanged. The two-ton Buddha statue, carved and shipped whole from Japan, still watches over the tranquil grounds, which now teem with more than 25,000 people every month. The temple, in fact, is widely considered one of the top 10 tourist attractions on the island. Every day, local artists and musicians share their crafts



The 50-year-old Byodo-In Temple is a half-size scale replica of a more than 950-year-old temple in Kyoto, Japan.

PHOTO COURTESY BYODO-IN TEMPLE

with the crowds as they walk around the premises.

"It's exactly as it was. The only thing that's really changed is that we've put in wheelchair access," Boser laughs.

Preserving this sense of peace is paramount to Byodo-

In's entire mission.

"Everything slows down the moment you cross the bridge. That feeling you get when you get there — it's just absolute peace," Boser says. "We don't do anything in particular; we just provide this incredible

environment that is beautiful and quiet and peaceful, and that appeals to people."

To celebrate its 50th anniversary, Byodo-In is hosting a Bon dance from 4 to 9 p.m. Saturday (Aug. 4). Visitors can enjoy traditional dancing, taiko,

food and a lantern-floating ceremony. The first 50 people to arrive will receive a free lantern and VIP status to watch the ceremonies, as well as a gift bag. For more information, visit byodo-in.com.

Temple employees also will store a time capsule away, to be opened on Byodo-In's 75th anniversary. The world around the temple might change — but it stands eternal.

"There is no better place, no better business prepared to protect this temple than a cemetery because we understand," Boser muses.

"Our purpose is to memorialize history, and that's what really makes this different. That's where you can be guaranteed, and the community can be guaranteed, that we are going to memorialize this temple and protect it forever."