**Komasaru**

Unlike most temples and shrines, which are guarded by *komainu* (guardian lion-dogs), Ima-Hie Jingū Shrine is watched over by an unusual pair. Two monkeys called *komasaru* sit on either side of the entrance to the main sanctuary. As is the case with their more common canine counterparts, the mouth of one of the pair is open while that of the other is firmly sealed—a pattern also seen in statues of guardian kings at the gates of Buddhist temples. The presence of these monkeys likely reflects the fact that monkeys are considered to be messengers of the deities of Hiyoshi Taisha, the original home of the gods of Ima-Hie Jingū Shrine.

Some theories suggest that the name *komasaru* derives from a play on words, since *masaru* not only refers to the Japanese macaque, but can also mean both “evil departs” and “superior.” Thus, these guardians might be believed to ward off evil and prevent calamities as well to grant success in various endeavors. The *komasaru* are behind metal fencing, which may be a preventative measure to keep these messengers of the gods from being stolen, or as legend has it, it may be to keep the monkeys from wandering off at night.