

## Honden, Main Shrine

Kasuga Taisha Shrine and the sacred Mt. Mikasa have been important religious sites since the shrine's foundation in the middle of the Nara period (710–784). The shrine continues its role as an important and active Shinto place of worship. Approximately 2,200 festivals, rites, and ceremonies are conducted at the shrine each year.

Within the main shrine complex, the most important area is the sacred ground surrounded by a corridor, with a large central gate, which is situated on the high ground toward the back of the compound. Behind the central gate are four Shinto shrines, one for each of the four principal deities enshrined at Kasuga Taisha Shrine. In front of the four shrines is the Oro, which is used today for rituals and as a place for people pray to the four kami deities. The sacred space surrounding the four main shrines has been used for Shinto rites since ancient times. The Oro was used for Buddhist rites until the Meiji period (1868–1912), when the government ordered the separation of Buddhism and Shinto.

The basic form of the shrine buildings has remained unchanged for over a thousand years, faithfully reconstructed every twenty years in accordance with Shinto tradition. The replacement of the honden roof every twenty years using cypress bark has special significance for the shrine and for the forests, since it takes time for cypress trees to regrow their bark.

Sixty-one other kami are enshrined at Kasuga Taisha Shrine, and while some shrines are undecorated plain wood, most of the shrine buildings are decorated in traditional Shinto orange and white. The vermillion used for the main four main shrine buildings is used only at Kasuga Taisha Shrine.

The two-storied main gate (Nanmon) is the primary entrance to the shrine compound. The smaller Keigamon gate to the left of the Nanmon is reserved for the exclusive use of the Fujiwara family, who commissioned the building of Kasuga Taisha Shrine almost 1,250 years ago.

The main shrine was initially used only for the performance of sacred rituals and prayers for the peace of the nation. However, beginning in the Edo period (1603–1867), it was opened to the public.