

Mt. Mikasa

Mt. Mikasa is located to the east of Kasuga Taisha Shrine and is also included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation.

According to legend, Takemikazuchi no Mikoto, the god of thunder, came to Nara during the early Nara period (710–784). In response to prayers for protection of the capital, he traveled from Kashima Jingu Shrine in Ibaraki Prefecture, close to present-day Tokyo, riding a white deer.

Four deities are enshrined at Kasuga Taisha Shrine: Takemikazuchi no Mikoto, the god of thunder; Futsunushi no Mikoto, the god of swords; Ame no Koyane no Mikoto, the god of wisdom; and the spouse of Ame no Koyane no Mikoto, a goddess called Himegami. These kami were enshrined here when a shrine was built on this hillside in 768. The building of the shrine allowed worshippers to pray to the kami without climbing to the top of the mountain.

Hunting and the cutting of trees have been prohibited on Mt. Mikasa since the Nara period. These restrictions allowed the forest to flourish and have preserved one of Japan's most beautiful primary forests. The forest includes such rare species as the Hime Haru cicada. Mt. Mikasa is a very important source of water for Kasuga Taisha Shrine and Nara City. Many of the streams flowing through Nara Park originate from the sacred Mt. Mikasa.