

Wakamiya Shrine

Wakamiya Shrine is located to the right (east) of the main shrine complex of Kasuga Taisha Shrine. It was originally constructed in 1135 and is dedicated to Ame no Oshikumone no Mikoto, the kami of water and purification. There are fifteen other subsidiary shrines, each honoring a Shinto deity that offers protection against the various troubles experienced in everyday life.

The Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri is an important four-day festival held each year from December 15th through December 18th in honor of the primary kami of Wakamiya Shrine. The festival, held since 1136, commences with prayers for protection against famine and epidemics.

On the third day of the festival, at midnight, priests transport the kami from Wakamiya Shrine to a temporary shrine outside the main shrine in an area known as Otabijo. This temporary shrine is constructed from pine wood and located near the first torii gate of Kasuga Taisha Shrine.

Traditional arts and music are performed before the temporary shrine as offerings to the gods. Many of the performances at the Onmatsuri are very rarely if ever to be seen elsewhere in Japan.

Shortly before midnight on the night of December 17th, the priests transport the kami back from Otabijo to Wakamiya Shrine, where the deity returns to protecting Nara and its inhabitants.