

Nature and History

Izumo Oyashiro (Izumo Grand Shrine) is one of the oldest Shinto shrines, appearing in both the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) and the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicle of Japan), the oldest existing chronicles of Japan dating back to the eighth century. According to the mythology, a host of deities built Izumo Grand Shrine as a residence for the god Okuninushi. Today Okuninushi is worshipped as a god of matchmaking, and many believers come to the shrine to pray for his blessing in matters of love, marriage, and relationships. The shrine's current main hall dates back to the eighteenth century. Today the hall stands 24 m above the ground, but recent archeological evidence indicates that in the past it may have towered twice as high. Located in a rich lush natural setting, the area around the shrine grounds is home to more than 2,000 trees and provides habitat for 90 species of birds and an array of wildflowers. Each year during the tenth month of the traditional lunar calendar, Izumo Grand Shrine hosts the annual Kamiarizuki, in which all the deities in Japan leave their home shrines to gather at this location for a conference.

Activities

Visitors can join a regularly scheduled 90-minute guided tour of the shrine grounds or try to spot birds and wildflowers in the surrounding forests. Stores and restaurants line the approach to the main gate to the shrine. Here guests can find souvenirs and sample local specialties like Izumo soba noodles and *zenzai* sweet bean soup.