

First built in the eighth century, Usa Jingu (known as Usa Hachiman until the late 1800s) was originally part of a religious complex that contained both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. The complex was controlled by the Buddhist temple Mirokuji. It was the head of a sprawling religious community centered around the worship of the deity Hachiman in the Kunisaki Peninsula. The modern shrine is located on the same mountain as the first shrine dedicated to Hachiman, one of the most widely revered deities (*kami*) in Japan. In fact, up until the religious separation laws passed by the Meiji government in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the location of modern-day Usa Jingu was a place of syncretic religious worship. The Mirokuji-Usa Jingu complex also was the center of political power in what is now Oita Prefecture. Originally the head of thousands of religious sites across Japan, it lost its political power in the Kamakura period when political control moved from Kyushu to the main island of Honshu. Usa Jingu's 1,300-year history illustrates the complicated relationship between Shinto and Buddhism in Japan.

While Shinto is an animistic religion and native to Japan, Buddhism was brought to the country early in the sixth century CE. At the time, Buddhist teachings were combined with the native traditions that became known as Shinto. One of the forms of this syncretism was *shugendo*. As *shugendo* became widespread in northern Kyushu and connected to places like Usa Jingu, shrine-temples also spread throughout the area, where they filled a role similar to that of today's schools. They were spaces of combined religious practice, and that combination was also expressed in their architecture. For example, many of these sites had both Shinto *torii* gates and Buddhist *mon* gates. This combined practice came to an end in the mid-nineteenth century when Buddhism and Shinto were forced to separate by the government. The shrine-temple complex was broken apart and became known as Usa Jingu. The religious rites practiced here became exclusively Shinto until the post-war period.