

Fuji Omuro Sengen-Jinja Shrine

Fuji Omuro Sengen-jinja is the oldest shrine on the slopes of Mt. Fuji. It was founded in the year 699 near the second station of the Yoshida Trail (elevation 1,700 meters). In 958, an additional complex was constructed some 15 kilometers away, on the southern shore of Lake Kawaguchiko, for the convenience of local worshippers. The two sites became known as the “original shrine” and “village shrine” (*motomiya* and *satomiya*), respectively.

Ascetics continued to visit the original shrine, joined from the seventeenth century by streams of Fujiko pilgrims. However, after the Fuji-Subaru Line began a direct service to the fifth station in 1964, visitor numbers fell dramatically. To protect the now seldom-visited original shrine from damage and fire, it was moved to a location near the village shrine in 1973. Only the crumbling prayer hall (*haiden*) still remains on the slopes.

An Architectural Marvel

The shrine is closely associated with local daimyo. In the sixteenth century, Takeda Shingen, the lord of nearby Kai province, worshipped there. The main hall of the village shrine that still stands today was donated by a Tokugawa branch family in 1612, shortly after the start of the Edo period (1603–1868). It preserves the Shinto architecture of the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568–1600), with flowing *karahafu* gables and roof shingles made of cypress bark.

Unusually for a Sengen shrine, the structure is oriented so that worshippers have their backs to the mountain’s peak. This is because the mountain is believed to descend each day to take up residence inside the shrine.

The statues flanking the torii are much smaller than those at other shrines. According to legend, Mt. Fuji shrank them as punishment for dallying with Benzaiten, the goddess enshrined on Unoshima island.

***Yabusame*: Mounted Archery**

On April 29, the shrine hosts an exhibition of mounted archery known as *yabusame*. Today’s *yabusame* traditions date back to the first Kamakura shogun, Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), who promoted it as a pastime among his samurai. The shrine’s *yabusame* exhibition used to take place at the mountain location called the *baba* (riding ground), but is now held in a park near the shrine.