

Main Sanctuary

From right to left, the four main halls of the sanctuary enshrine:

Hall 1: Niutsuhime, the main goddess of the shrine, who is said to exorcise misfortune, and is connected to longevity, agriculture, silkworm culture and weaving.

Hall 2: Takanomiko (also known as Kariba Myojin), son of Niutsuhime, who appeared in the guise of a hunter to Kobo Daishi (774–835), the founder of Koyasan, and led him to the mountaintop. Also said to guide supplicants on the path to happiness.

Hall 3: Ogetsuhime, the goddess who governs and protects food.

Hall 4: Ichikishimahime, a Shinto representation of Benzaiten, the Buddhist goddess of financial prosperity and the arts.

In 1469, the *honden* (main sanctuary) was reconstructed in a shrine architecture style from the earlier Kamakura period (1185–1333), which is how it still appears today. The roof is a marvel of traditional craftsmanship, made up of countless 2-millimeter-thick strips of layered *hinoki* cypress bark compressed to create a thick, waterproof layer of thatch.

The shrine's brilliant vermilion color is meant to resemble cinnabar, an ore of mercury that has been used for many centuries to make a vivid red pigment. Cinnabar's bright orange-red color was considered powerful protection from evil forces and bad luck, and many temples and shrines were painted vermilion to call upon this supernatural power. As the color was immensely difficult to compose, the profuse use of it here is a symbol of the shrine's high status.

Visitors may notice that the main sanctuary is more heavily decorated with intricate carvings and paintings than most shrines. Painted carvings of dragons, elephants and *shishi* lion-dogs adorn the horizontal beams, while on the eaves are carvings of the *ogarasu* crow, which, according to legend, helped protect Japan's shores from the Mongolian invasions in the thirteenth century.