

Dōmyōji Tenmangū Shrine

Dōmyōji Tenmangū Shrine is a popular place to pray for academic success and to enjoy the spring plum blossoms, both of which have close associations with the shrine's main deity, Sugawara no Michizane (845–903).

Michizane was an influential scholar, poet, and minister in the court of Emperor Uda (876–931). After Michizane's death in 903, he was deified as the kami of scholarship and literature, Tenman-Tenjin. The hundreds of Tenmangū shrines built throughout Japan are dedicated to him. Students go to these shrines to leave a votive tablet or *ema* before a large exam.

At many Tenmangū shrines there is a bronze statue of a bull. Worshippers touch the bull's body where they would like to see an improvement in their own body. The bull's connection to Michizane comes from a legend told about the scholar's funeral procession. The bull pulling the cart carrying Michizane's body suddenly came to a stop. This was taken as a sign from heaven, and Michizane was promptly buried at that spot.

Dōmyōji Tenmangū Shrine has been entrusted with the only known relics of Michizane—objects used by Michizane during his life: an ivory baton indicating his rank, a white porcelain inkstone, an ivory and tortoiseshell comb, an ornamental knife, leather belts, and a copper mirror carved with a phoenix and a koto player. All the items are recognized as National Treasures and are displayed only on special days.

Most Tenmangū shrines have Japanese plum trees planted within the grounds because Michizane was a great admirer of plum blossoms and wrote many poems about them. Behind the main hall of Dōmyōji Tenmangū lies a grove of over 800 trees including some 80 different varieties. From mid-February to mid-March, the shrine holds a famous plum festival, where visitors can enjoy the sweet-smelling blossoms along with performances of traditional music and martial arts.