

Kushifuru Shrine

Kushifuru Shrine is built on the site where it is said Ninigi no Mikoto, grandson of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Omikami, arrived with other gods (*kami*) when his grandmother sent him to rule the earth and establish the ruling line. Ninigi came bearing three gifts she had given him: a mirror, a jewel, and a sword. These three subsequently became the imperial regalia. Ninigi and his attendants descended through the clouds, which he dispersed by scattering rice stalks across the land, symbolically giving birth to rice culture starting from this place, and reached the mountaintop of Kushifuru no Mine, where the shrine now stands. He declared the land to be of fertile and built a grand palace of immense height and towering columns. It was not until 1694 that a shrine dedicated to these deities was built on the mountain where they are believed to have arrived in ancient antiquity. Even before this, it is believed the mountain was revered as the abode of the divine and therefore long regarded as sacred. It was, in fact, thought to be too sacred even to build a physical shrine. The efforts to construct the shrine by people of 18 Takachiho villages was supported by Miura Akihiro, a high-ranking government official of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867). It was known under a variety of names until 1871, when it was officially called Futagami Shrine, which is also the name of a mythical mountaintop shrine under which the fearful deity Kihachi resided in a cave. The name was changed to Kushifuru Shrine in 1910.

Naturally, the principle deity of worship at the shrine is Ninigi himself, whose successful founding of the imperial line is seen in the first emperor of Japan, Jimmu, the god's great-grandson. Other *kami* venerated at the shrine include Takemikazuchi, whose way of proving his strength is said to have been the origin of the sport of sumo. Noteworthy decorative features of the shrine's main sanctuary include the intricate wood carvings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including phoenix and dragon motifs drawn from Chinese mythology.