

Mototsumiya Festival

Hakone Mototsumiya shrine on the summit of Mt. Koma honors the deities of nearby Mt. Kami or Kamiyama, the name of which translates to “mountain of the gods.” Local people and pilgrims alike worshiped the peaks of Hakone long before 757 CE, traditionally cited as the year the priest Mangan founded Hakone Shrine. Some form of sanctuary is likely to have existed on Mt. Koma since distant antiquity, so Hakone Mototsumiya can rightfully be called the oldest shrine in the area. Its current structures were built in the early 1960s on the initiative of Tsutsumi Yasujiro (1889–1964), an entrepreneur who played a significant role in the development of Hakone as a tourist destination.

The annual Mototsumiya Festival on October 24 has been held since 1964, the year of the first Tokyo Olympics. It is intended both as a prayer for world peace and as a tribute to the mountain deities. The shrine’s priests light a sacred fire, which is then brought down from the peak by ropeway and ferried in a boat further along the shore of Lake Ashi to Hakone Shrine. Kept alive through the night, the flame is used to light several smaller torches the next morning; these fires are then transported to a handful of other shrines in the region, spreading the light of peace throughout Hakone.