

## Deities and Buildings of Hotaka Jinja Shrine

A massive wooden torii gate marks the entrance to the shrine compound. The first building visitors see is the *kaguraden*, a pavilion for sacred dances that is now used for festival ceremonies, weddings and other events. Beyond is the hall of worship, where people make their offerings and follow prayer rituals. Behind the hall are the three *honden*, smaller sanctuary buildings where the gods are enshrined, with the center one dedicated to the main deity, Hotakami no Mikoto.

Like similar buildings at Ise Jingu, Japan's most sacred Shinto shrine, each *honden* is rebuilt every two decades to the same exact specifications. The reconstruction times are staggered, so visitors can tell which of the three has been most recently rebuilt by the weathering of their wooden surfaces.

This cycle of reconstruction ensures that ancient rituals and traditional shrine-related architectural details and techniques are passed down to each new generation. For instance, at both ends of the central *honden*'s roof, there are forked finials called *chigi* that extend up from the roof ridges. This design dates back several millennia, and while it is thought to have originally been a structural feature, now it is purely decorative. Such forks can be seen at Ise Jingu and certain other Shinto shrines.

There are many nautically themed statues, carvings, and other artifacts at Hotaka Jinja that illustrate the folklore and unusual history of the ancient clan that populated this area.