

Shirayama-Hime Shrine

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The Grand Shrine Protecting the Hokuriku Region

Shirayama-Hime Shrine

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Mt. Hakusan and Shirayama-Hime Shrine

The Hakusan Faith and Shirayama-Hime Shrine

Mt. Hakusan spreads across four prefectures: Ishikawa, Fukui, Gifu and Toyama. Because of its tall peaks and massive size, it has been considered a sacred mountain for centuries. As the meltwater from Hakusan is an indispensable water source for a vast area, even people living in the foothills and far-off flatlands have long understood the importance of the mountain, and offered prayers of gratitude throughout the year.

In ancient times, mountains were considered the realm of the gods, and climbing the peaks was forbidden. However, with the growth of *Hakusan shinko* (the Hakusan faith), people began to climb the mountain as a form of religious devotion, eventually creating trails up to the summit.

Shirayama-Hime Shrine is said to have been established over 2,100 years ago, and for centuries has been an important base for worshippers climbing the mountain. Today, it is the head shrine for thousands of Hakusan and Shirayama shrines nationwide. Shirayama-Hime Shrine is also the grand shrine protecting the Hokuriku region, which encompasses Ishikawa, Fukui, Toyama, and Niigata prefectures.

Enshrined Deities

Every Shinto shrine has specific *kami*—gods, or spirits—enshrined within. Shirayama-Hime enshrines Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto, the gods who are said to have created the islands of Japan from seawater.

The shrine is also dedicated to the goddess Kukuri Hime no Kami. The word *kukuri* means “to tie” or “to bind,” and Kukuri Hime is thought to have reconciled the two creators of Japan after they had quarreled. As such, she is revered as the goddess of matchmaking and marital bliss. In addition, she is considered a water deity who controls rivers and the sea, connected to the fact that Hakusan’s meltwater feeds four major rivers.

Shrine Blessings

Each of the enshrined deities can bestow specific blessings on worshippers. The three powerful gods enshrined at Shirayama-Hime Shrine provide a range of blessings, including good harvests, large hauls of fish, and successful matchmaking, all important considerations in this agricultural area.

In addition, many visitors stop by to pay their respects and wish for a peaceful household, safe travels, business prosperity, educational success, harmonious marriages, good fortune and long life, and the prosperity of descendants.

Shrine Crest

The intricately designed crest, a gourd flower inside a three-tiered hexagon, contains several auspicious symbols. The hexagon represents a tortoiseshell pattern, as tortoises are considered a symbol of long life. The three tiers represent continued good fortune in the family: past to future, parent to child, and child to grandchild. Gourds were highly valued in ancient times, and were usually offered to the gods; the gourd flower in the crest represents a prayer to the deities for the prosperity of future generations.

The Shrine Grounds

1. Omotesando Path

This 250-meter main walkway is lined with cryptomeria, zelkova, and maple trees, hinting at the splendor of the shrine ahead.

2. Biwa Waterfall

The clear stream that runs along the Omotesando originates from this waterfall, which is illuminated at night. The sound of the splashing water is said to purify the mind.

3. Ancient Sacred Cryptomeria Tree

This tree is located by the *temizuya*, the water-purification basin on the Omotesando. The tree is wrapped by a thick rope (*shimenawa*) with paper streamers (*shide*), which indicate its sacred status. This 800-year-old tree has a circumference of 12 meters at its base, and it rises to a height of some 42 meters.

4. Three Sacred Cryptomeria Trees

These *sugi* (cryptomeria) trees were grown from seeds planted by Emperor Hirohito, which were then replanted here once they grew into saplings.

5. Misogi-sha and Misogi-ba

Misogi is a purification ceremony in which participants are immersed in meltwater from Mt. Hakusan. The *misogi-sha* is the small shrine towards the back of the shrine grounds, while the *misogi-ba* is the pool in which this solemn ceremony takes place.

Shrine Etiquette

Passing Through the Torii Gate

Torii gates mark the entrance to Shinto shrines as a passageway from the secular world to sacred ground. Visitors bow once before passing through the gate to show respect.

Walk the Omotesando Path

The walkway from the torii gate to the main area of the shrine is the Omotesando. The center area of the path is believed to be the walkway of the gods, so visitors should keep to one side.

Purification at the Temizuya

The *temizuya*, or water-purification basin, is at the end of the Omotesando. This purification custom dates back to a time when worshippers were expected to ritually cleanse themselves

in the sea or a river before entering sacred shrine grounds. Today, visitors perform a simplified version of that tradition by washing their hands and rinsing their mouths with water.

Temizuya Etiquette

1. With your right hand, fill the dipper with water and pour some onto the palm of your left hand (leave most of the water in the dipper).
2. Take the dipper in your left hand and pour water into the palm of your right hand.
3. To rinse your mouth, hold the dipper in your right hand and pour some of the water into your cupped left hand, and bring it to your mouth. Rinse your mouth and spit out the remaining water at the foot of the basin.
4. With both hands, raise the dipper so that the water runs down the handle, cleansing it as well.
5. Return the dipper to its resting place, with the cup facing down.

How to Pray at a Shrine

Make an Offering

Long ago, supplicants usually offered rice to the gods, but these days it is more common to offer money. In front of the shrine's worship hall (*haiden*) there is a wooden offering box with a slotted top. Toss a coin into the box. Many believe five-yen coins are particularly lucky, but any amount is acceptable.

Bow Twice, Clap Twice, Bow Once

After presenting the cash offering, pay your respects by bowing twice, clapping twice, and then bowing once. The bows should be slow and deep, until your back is almost parallel with the ground. To clap, spread your hands shoulder-width apart and bring them together slowly twice.

Leaving the Shrine

After passing through the torii on your way out of the shrine, show respect by turning around and bowing once more.

Omamori Charms

In Shinto tradition, items such as stones and mirrors are believed to bestow the power of the gods on the wearer and ward off disaster and danger. Over the years, these sacred items evolved into colorful amulets called *omamori*, which provide protection and comfort for a variety of needs.

Omamori are blessed by the priests and imbued with the power of the gods, so those who buy them usually keep them close or place them in safe locations. It is generally considered best to replace *omamori* yearly, burning the old ones in sacred fires on New Year's Day.

***Omamori* ¥1,000**

Available in red, blue, and white.

Omamori for success in examinations ¥1,000

***Omamori* for safe travels ¥1,000**

Available in red and blue.

Matchmaking *omamori* ¥1,000
Available in red, blue, and yellow.

Happiness *omamori* ¥800

***Omamori* for professional success** ¥1,000

Shrine Museum

Over its long history, Shirayama-Hime Shrine has amassed a significant collection of treasures. The ancient historical materials stored here are irreplaceable artifacts that offer a glimpse into the early days of the Hakusan faith. The collection also includes precious historical materials from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including historical records of the Maeda clan who ruled the Kaga Domain (modern-day Ishikawa and Toyama prefectures). These priceless treasures give us a glimpse into life in the past and the long history of both the shrine and Mt. Hakusan.

Opening Hours

April 1 to October 31: daily, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

November 1 to November 30: daily, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

December 1 to March 31: closed for winter season

Admission

Adults: ¥300

Children under 18: free

<CAPTIONS>

Komainu guardian dogs

Small box with gold inlay design depicting a phoenix