

Kashiwa Island and the Gongen Festival

The craggy form of Kashiwa Island rises from the waves at the mouth of Sagiura Harbor. A natural breakwater, it has long been venerated for the crucial shelter it provides. High on the island's rocky slope and accessible by rough steps carved into the cliffside, Kashiwa Shrine is nestled below a stone overhang. Two deities are enshrined here: the unruly Shinto storm god Susanoo, and Ebisu, patron of fishermen.

Every July 31 at sunset, residents celebrate the Gongen Festival. A Shinto priest offers a ritual invocation, and townsfolk board their boats. For the festival, the boats are specially decorated with lanterns and *tairyōbata*, banners that signal an especially big catch. Maneuvering in procession, the boats circle Kashiwa Island as those aboard pray for safety and good fishing in the year to come.
