

## Shiratori Shrine

Shiratori Shrine is said to have been founded over a thousand years ago by the priest Shoku (910–1007) after he was visited by an apparition while undergoing religious training in the Ebino Highlands. The apparition of the legendary prince Yamato Takeru instructed the priest to build a place of worship near the source of the Shiratori hot springs. Shoku founded Shiratori Shrine in 959.

The *honden* main hall was rebuilt toward the end of the Edo period (1603–1867), incorporating intricate *makibashira* ornamented pillars carved with dragons and clouds and other architectural details that preserve the particular blend of Buddhist and Shinto styles common to this region.

The shrine has strong ties to Todaiji Temple in Nara. Todaiji's main hall has burned down twice to date. The last time it was rebuilt, approximately 320 years ago, a nationwide search was undertaken to find trees large enough for the long rainbow beams (*koryo*) needed to support the 3,020-ton roof of Todaiji's Great Buddha Hall. After a 20-year search, the towering Japanese red pines growing on Shiratori Shrine grounds were selected, and they continue to bear their load to the present day.

## Stone Statue of Yamato Takeru

The principal deity enshrined at Shiratori Shrine, Yamato Takeru, is an important figure in Japanese mythology. This stone carving was installed in 2012 to mark 1,300 years since the compilation of the *Kojiki*, Japan's oldest chronicle, which recounts the life and adventures of Yamato Takeru. Depicting the hero who is thought to have brought peace to southern Kyushu, this statue honors his deep connection to the area.

## The Sacred Cedar Tree, Shiratori Meoto Sugi

Located on a secluded path to the side of the main shrine building is a towering cedar tree with a diameter of 1.9 meters and a 6-meter circumference. Thought to be over 500 years old, the tree witnessed the last time Mt. Kirishima erupted in the late Muromachi period (1336–1573) and has been long revered as a sacred tree by the local people.

## Projectile Dedicated to Bestowing Divine Protection

This monument was donated to the shrine during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) for *buun chokyu*, or “continued luck in the fortunes of war.” The projectile weighs 80 kilograms, and it represents the burden that soldiers must bear on the battlefield to achieve victory. According to legend, it bestows divine protection on those able to lift it.