

### **Yōmeimon Gate (National Treasure)**

Over 500 elaborately carved figures adorn this gate, including Chinese sages, scenes from the Chinese classics, children, and both real and mythical animals. The gate has been nicknamed the Higurashimon, meaning “Sunset Gate,” because one could look at the carvings all day without growing bored. The gate shares its official name, “Yōmeimon,” with one of the 12 outer gates of the former Heian Imperial Palace in Kyoto. The two archers guarding the gate are depictions of the emperor’s bodyguards during the Heian period (794–1185).

Many of the gate’s decorative elements are thought to have metaphorical or spiritual meanings. For example, the pattern on one of the 12 pillars is upside down. It is said in Japan that the moment something reaches a state of perfection, it will immediately begin to decline. The “mistake” on the pillar was likely intended to ensure that Tōshōgū Shrine would not deteriorate, and by extension, neither would the Tokugawa family. Another reference to Tokugawa rule is the *kirin* motif: the *kirin* is a mythical and virtuous beast that is said to appear in this world only in times of peace and good government.

The curved gables (*karahafu*) on each side of the hip-and-gable roof are typical of gates and entrances at temples and palaces.