

Miagatahiko-sha Shrine

Miagatahiko-sha is a subsidiary shrine on the grounds of Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine that honors the Yatagarasu, a great three-legged crow from Japanese legend. The current shrine building dates to 1867. Today, a bronze statue of the Yatagarasu stands before the shrine.

Legendary Connections

According to the ancient chronicles *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, the Yatagarasu was a servant of Amaterasu-no-Okami, the goddess of the sun. The bird was sent to guide the legendary first emperor Jimmu from Kumano to found the first national capital in what is now Nara Prefecture.

The word *yatagarasu* means “eight-span crow,” which describes the Yatagarasu’s great size. Although the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* do not mention its legs, chronicles and records dating from a few centuries later describe it as having three. Legends of a three-legged crow associated with the sun are found in many parts of Asia.

Return to Kumano

Since Amaterasu-no-Okami is among the deities enshrined at Nachi Taisha, the Yatagarasu is a servant of the Kumano deities. It is also a deity in its own right, known for offering guidance and direction. According to local legend, after guiding Emperor Jimmu to present-day Nara, the Yatagarasu returned to Kumano. When it settled down to rest and tucked its beak under its wing, it turned into the Yatagarasu-ishi (Yatagarasu Stone), which still sits on the grounds of Nachi Taisha. Tradition holds that the shrine was moved to this site from Nachi Waterfall because the Yatagarasu chose to alight here.

The Yatagarasu is often used as a symbol of the Kumano region. Soccer fans might recognize it as part of the logo of Japan’s national men’s and women’s teams. The symbol was chosen to honor Katsuura-born Nakamura Kakunosuke (1878–1906), who first translated the rules of soccer into Japanese and worked tirelessly to promote the sport in Japan.