

Hasshogu Shrine

Hasshogu Shrine in the Yoshitake district of Munakata is said to have been founded in 674. Four pairs of deities are venerated at the shrine, including those who created the islands of Japan and those who protected Emperor Jimmu (believed to Japan's first emperor), on a journey through northern Kyushu.

Local legend recounts that Emperor Jimmu was traveling through the area from his base in Hyuga (Miyazaki) to conquer the lands of Yamato (present-day Nara) when a deity appeared, riding a red horse. The deity guided the emperor safely through the area. Several historic votive tablets (*ema*) at the shrine depict this story.

It is said that a shrine was built here at the request of Emperor Tenmu (631–686), Japan's fortieth emperor, to enshrine the deities who protected Emperor Jimmu. Hasshogu Shrine has played a role in protecting the imperial family and their retainers since it was established. Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), the famed warlord and politician who completed the sixteenth-century unification of Japan begun by Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), prayed here for victory when he came to subdue the powerful warlords of Kyushu in 1586. After his success, he dedicated several treasures to the shrine, including a sword.

An annual autumn festival has been celebrated at Hasshogu Shrine for over 200 years. Held on the third weekend of October, the festival starts with an evening procession of local people in Edo-period (1603–1867) dress, carrying lanterns and portable shrines from Hasshogu Shrine to the Tsuru River. The approach to the shrine is lined with food stalls, adding to the festive atmosphere. Other events during the festival weekend include horseback archery performances, traditional dances, and children's sumo matches. The festival concludes at midnight on the Sunday.