

Highlights of Kabushima

Kabushima Jinja Shrine

Kabushima Jinja Shrine, visible atop the hill opposite the Rest Area, dates back to the Kamakura period (1185–1333). The shrine was first built in 1269 in honor of the goddess Benzaiten, who is worshipped in both the Buddhist and Shinto traditions as a guardian deity of fortune, financial success, bountiful harvest, safe passage, wisdom, the arts, and music. A statue of Benzaiten inside the shrine depicts the goddess holding a bow, sword, hatchet, hunting snare, arrow, mallet, spear, and gem in her eight hands. The torii gate and male fertility deity above her head reflect Benzaiten's reputation as a goddess of matchmaking, marriage, and safe childbirth.

Historically, rulers of the Hachinohe domain were patrons of the shrine, and would visit to pray for the birth of healthy heirs. Fishermen would pray for safe passage at sea and a bountiful catch, and merchants and tradesmen would pray for fortune and success. Visitors today still ask for good fortune in business, perhaps in part because the *kabu* in Kabushima sounds like the Japanese word for “stocks.”

Before the shrine burned down in 2015, its ceiling was decorated with a 56-tile mural depicting the black-tailed gulls that inhabit the island and are considered messengers of the gods. Reconstruction of the shrine took five years and was funded in part by donations from both local residents and visitors. The work was done only during periods when the gulls were away from Kabushima, so as not to disturb their mating cycle.

The rebuilt shrine is a modern-looking, two-story wooden structure. The ceiling of the atrium features a carving of heavenly nymphs holding traditional musical instruments, soaring in the sky with gulls. On the ceiling in the Hall of Offerings is a dynamic Chinese-style painting of a dragon, one of Benzaiten's messengers, rising from white-capped waves.

Festivals

Two major festivals are celebrated at Kabushima throughout the year: the Kabushima Festival and the Samehama Festival.

The Kabushima Festival is held on the third weekend of April, during the black-tailed gull's mating season. During the celebration, a procession carries the gull-adorned

mikoshi portable shrine down the steps of Kabushima Jinja. There are also stage performances featuring traditional music and dance.

The Samehama Festival takes place on the fourth Sunday of July. Once again the *mikoshi* from the shrine is carried in a procession, this time to the nearby beach where it is ceremonially submerged. This festival, too, features various stage performances.

Nearby Sights

Hachinohe City Marine Science Museum (Marient)

The Hachinohe City Marine Science Museum, or Marient, showcases the beauty of the nearby ocean and the importance of Hachinohe's fisheries. Visitors can see sea life up close in large fish tanks, or check out interactive exhibits about marine and earth sciences and displays offering a range of information on the region's marine life. The museum restaurant serves fresh seafood, and an observation deck looks out over Hachinohe harbor.

Kabushima Swimming Area

This sandy beach is one of the draws of Kabushima. The swimming season typically runs from mid-July to mid-August, when local families flock here to enjoy the gentle waves and warm waters. Showers and changing rooms are available.

Nishinomiya Jinja Shrine

This small shrine near Ebisuhama harbor is home to an unusual whale-shaped stone known as Hachinohe Taro. Legend has it that one day a whale appeared in the waters off Hachinohe, and with it a seemingly endless bounty of fish. Local people believed it was a protective deity and affectionately named it Hachinohe Taro. The whale disappeared for a time, and when it returned, it had been mortally wounded by a harpoon. When the whale died, it turned to stone—said to be the same stone that rests at Nishinomiya Jinja.