

Shiwahiko Jinja Shrine and Shiogama Jinja Shrine

Shiogama Jinja Shrine is thought to have been founded before the Nara period (710–794), although the exact year is unknown. Shiwahiko Jinja Shrine was moved to its present location more recently in 1874. Today, these two Shinto shrines share the same grounds and some festivals.

Shiogama Jinja venerates three deities. Shiotsuchi Oji no Kami, the protector of the ocean who taught people the secret of salt-making, is enshrined in the detached sanctuary (*betsugu*). The warrior deities Takemikazuchi no Kami and Futsunushi no Kami are respectively enshrined in the left and right sanctuary (*sagu* and *ugu*). The main shrine buildings, from 1704, are constructed in the *nagare-zukuri* style, which is characterized by an asymmetrical sloping roof that is longer at the front than at the back.

Shiwahiko Jinja is dedicated to Shiwahiko no Kami, the god of agriculture, who is also the guardian deity of the Shiogama area. The lavish black- and vermillion-lacquered main shrine building was rebuilt relatively recently in 1938.

The steep 202-step stone stairway leading to the shrines is lined with stone lanterns and flanked by a thick grove of cryptomeria (*sugi*) trees. At the top stands the stately Zuishinmon Gate, erected in the 1700s.

The shrine grounds cover around 30,000 square meters of a slope overlooking the city of Shiogama and the islands of Matsushima Bay. In addition to 14 shrine buildings designated Important Cultural Properties, the grounds also include serene Japanese-style gardens and around 300 cherry trees of 40 different varieties, including many *Shiogama zakura*, designated as Natural Monuments of Japan. The fluffy blooms of these double-flowered cherry trees appear in late April to early May.