

Hata-age Benzaiten Shrine

Hata-age Benzaiten Shrine enshrines Benzaiten, the deity of knowledge, beauty, and the arts. Benzaiten is associated with water, and shrines dedicated to her are often located near a pond, lake, or the sea. Benzaiten has been venerated at Tsurugaoka Hachimangu since it was founded in the late twelfth century. According to legend, Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199) prayed to the deity **for victory** before he attacked the rival Taira clan in 1180. He eventually vanquished his enemies and established himself as the military ruler of Japan, with Kamakura as the seat of government and Tsurugaoka Hachimangu as the city's spiritual center.

The current shrine building was built in 1980 to commemorate the 800th anniversary of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, based on drawings from the Bunsei era (1818–1830). There is a carving above the stairs that depicts Benzaiten playing a *biwa* (short-necked lute). The white banners displayed on the grounds are dedicated by local worshipers and are based on those used by the Minamoto clan in battle. It is thought that the people who dedicate them will receive the same blessings that Yoritomo did. Behind the shrine is the Masako Stone, named after Yoritomo's wife Hojo Masako (1156–1225), where people pray for a happy marriage and fertility.