

Hata-age Benzaiten Shrine

Hata-age Benzaiten Shrine is located on a small island in the Genji Pond. It enshrines Benzaiten, the deity of knowledge, beauty, and the arts. Benzaiten is associated with water, and shrines 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, eventually vanquishing his enemies and establishing himself as the military ruler of Japan, with Kamakura as his seat of government and Tsurugaoka Hachimangu as the city's spiritual center. White banners modeled on those used by the Minamoto clan in battle are now dedicated and displayed at Hata-age Benzaiten, which was rebuilt in 1980—the 800th anniversary of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu—based on drawings from the Bunsei era (1818–1830). There is a carving above the stairs at the front of the building which depicts Benzaiten playing a *biwa* (short-necked lute). 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.