

***Yabusame* Archery Track**

The 250-meter *yabusame* mounted archery track crosses the approach to the main shrine at right angles near the middle of the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu grounds. *Yabusame* events are held every year and attract crowds of visitors. In this ancient tradition, archers dressed in ceremonial clothing attempt to hit three targets set up along the track while riding at full gallop from the eastern to the western end. The *yabusame* ritual is dedicated to Hachiman, the guardian deity of the warrior class, and the targets are placed on the southern side of the track to avoid shooting in the direction of the shrine.

Horseback archery was originally a strictly martial pursuit and was highly valued on the battlefield in medieval Japan. It gradually became a ritual practice performed at shrines and at the imperial court in Kyoto. Tsurugaoka Hachimangu hosted its first *yabusame* ritual in 1187 on the orders of Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), the first Kamakura shogun and the founder of the shrine. Yoritomo had his warriors trained intensively in the use of the bow and arrow.

The Ogasawara school of **mounted** archery performs *yabusame* in an elaborate and highly formalized ceremony on September 16. A *yabusame* event is also held in April, when the rival Takeda school takes to the track as part of the annual Kamakura Festival.