

Dankazura

The Dankazura is an elevated 450-meter pedestrian pathway between the second and third torii gates on the approach to the shrine. It is lined with cherry trees that usually bloom from late March to mid-April. Under the trees are azaleas that flower later in spring and stone lanterns donated by supporters of the shrine. The entrance is guarded by a pair of concrete lion-dogs (*komainu*). The one on the right has its mouth open, as if pronouncing “a” (the first sound of the Sanskrit syllabary), while the other statue seems to be speaking the syllable “un” (the last sound in Sanskrit) with its mouth nearly closed. This combination of letters, the beginning and the end, represents the sum of all things.

The Dankazura was originally built in 1182 by Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), the first Kamakura shogun and founder of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu. He ordered the construction of a **paved** road along the entire length of the main approach to the shrine from the sea. The project was undertaken to pray for the safe delivery of an heir, as Yoritomo’s wife Hojo Masako (1156–1225) was pregnant at the time. It was completed in time for the birth of their son, Yorie (1182–1204), who would become the second Kamakura shogun.

The design may have also served a defensive purpose: the path once had moats on both sides and appears to become narrower as it approaches the shrine grounds, thereby making it easier to repel an **enemy attack**. The Dankazura has undergone repeated changes over the centuries, including removal of the portion between the First Torii and Second Torii gates in 1878 to make room for the tracks of the new Yokosuka Railway Line. Repairs completed in 2016 included replanting the cherry trees, restoring damaged masonry, and replacing the stone lanterns.