

Maiden (Lower Worship Hall)

The Maiden (Hall of Dance) is located directly in front of the grand stone staircase that leads to the Main Shrine. It is also known as the Lower Worship Hall, where visitors unable to climb the stairs can pray to the deities enshrined within the Main Shrine. Many rituals and performances of sacred dance and music, as well as traditional Shinto weddings, are held at the Maiden throughout the year. The building is lacquered in red and black and decorated with carvings and paintings of flowers, leaves, and birds, which symbolize the presence of water. In the years immediately after the founding of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, the site was occupied by a corridor attached to an adjacent shrine. In 1186, that corridor was where Lady Shizuka (1165–1211), a renowned court dancer, performed for Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), the founder of the Kamakura shogunate (warrior-led government).

Shizuka was the mistress of Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–1189), Yoritomo's half-brother and a warrior renowned for his military prowess. Yoritomo had fallen out with Yoshitsune after the establishment of the shogunate and while on the run from Yoritomo, Yoshitsune became separated from Shizuka, who was captured by the shogunate forces and brought to Kamakura. When ordered to dance for Yoritomo, she recited poems revealing her longing for Yoshitsune. Yoritomo was angered and wanted Shizuka executed, but his wife intervened to save her life, arguing that she would have expressed the same feelings had she been in the dancer's position. This story was later recounted in many epic plays and chronicles.