

Takebe Taisha Shrine

Takebe Taisha Shrine is one of the most important Shinto shrines in Shiga Prefecture. The shrine is located on the eastern side of the Seta River and dates from the eighth century. It is designated the prefecture's *ichinomiya* (chief shrine), a special status it has held since at least the Heian period (794–1185).

Takebe Taisha is dedicated to Yamato Takeru, a legendary warrior prince said to have lived from 72 CE to 114 CE. Yamato Takeru is one of Japan's most popular folk heroes, said to have wielded the sword Kusanagi, a magical weapon that is one of the imperial regalia of Japan. There are many shrines dedicated to Yamato Takeru throughout Japan, but Takebe Taisha is one of the oldest.

A long gravel walkway flanked by cedar trees leads from the torii gate through the secluded grounds to the main shrine. Near the entrance is a *chozuya*, a water basin for purifying one's hands and mouth before entering the shrine. The basin at Takebe Taisha plays music while you wash your hands.

Three cedar trees stand clustered together in front of the main shrine building. The trees are the symbol of the shrine and are considered sacred. Eight smaller shrines are arranged on either side of the main shrine. They are dedicated to different deities and were designed to complement the Yamato Takeru shrine, as though forming part of the prince's retinue. Next to the structures is a small pond with koi carp.

Takebe Taisha has a treasure hall that houses statues of Shinto deities made in the Heian period. The ancient artifacts have been designated Important Cultural Properties. Also on display are the *mikoshi* (portable shrines) used during the annual Senkosai Festival on August 17.