

## Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine

Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine enshrines the Shinto deity of Mt. Hiei and is the head shrine of the more than 3,800 Hiyoshi, Hie, and Sanno shrines across Japan. Hiyoshi Taisha claims a 2,000-year history and at its height featured shrines to 108 different deities.

The shrine's grounds are lush and secluded, and the sound of the Omiya River current, as it flows through the precincts, drowns out the sounds of the outside world. In autumn, the area is blanketed with vibrant foliage that falls from the more than 3,000 maple trees on the grounds.

At the shrine entrance is Omiya Bridge, thought to be the oldest stone bridge in Japan. It was built in the late 1600s after the shrine, including the previous wooden bridge, was burned down. The shrine is also famous for its distinctive Sanno Torii gate with a triangular shape on top that represents Mt. Hiei. The mountain is home to many wild monkeys, which are considered the messengers of the mountain deity.

The main halls of the Nishihongu (western main shrine) and the Higashihongu (eastern main shrine) are designated National Treasures. Their traditional hinoki cypress bark roofs are replaced every 50 years. Twin *komainu* guardian statues dating back over 400 years stand before both halls.