

## **Deities and History of Iwashimizu Hachimangu Shrine**

Iwashimizu Hachimangu enshrines Hachiman, protector of Japan and the imperial family. Hachiman is the deified form of Emperor Ojin, the legendary 15th emperor of Japan, and is worshipped as one entity with his mother, Empress Jingu, and Hime Okami, a trio of goddesses associated with the sea.

Hachiman was ceremonially transferred to Mt. Otokoyama from Usa Jingu Shrine in Kyushu by the monk Gyokyo in 859 and was officially enshrined in a newly constructed sanctuary in 860. Hachiman is considered a sacred ancestor of the imperial family and has been worshipped by both ruling and retired emperors, who have made more than 240 grand pilgrimages to Iwashimizu Hachimangu over the centuries. The Minamoto, a powerful warrior clan, also regarded Hachiman as their patron deity. With their support, Hachiman shrines spread throughout the country and became the second most numerous type of shrine in Japan.

Shinto and Buddhism were practiced together in syncretic form for centuries, and Hachiman was a widely worshipped deity with both Shinto and Buddhist aspects during this time. The two religions were separated by government decree in the nineteenth century, and Iwashimizu Hachimangu has been worshipping Hachiman as the Shinto deity Hachiman Okami since then.

The most important ritual at Iwashimizu Hachimangu is the Iwashimizu-sai, held annually on September 15th. It has a long history as a *chokusai*, a ceremony held by imperial order to present offerings and prayers at designated shrines on behalf of the emperor. During this ritual, the deities are transferred to three portable shrines and carried down to the base of Mt. Otokoyama, where an imperial messenger conducts prayers for peace and protection of the nation. The public festivities include traditional music and court dance performances, as well as a ceremonial release of captive birds and fish, originally a Buddhist ritual that reflects the syncretic roots of Iwashimizu Hachimangu.