

Main Shrine

The main shrine of Iwashimizu Hachimangu is Japan's largest and oldest example of the *hachiman-zukuri* style of shrine architecture, and many of its structures are designated National Treasures. The buildings date back to a large-scale reconstruction that spanned many years and was completed in 1634 under the third Tokugawa shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651). Iwashimizu Hachimangu also received support from many other powerful lords: Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), regarded as the first great unifier of Japan, donated a gold-coated rain gutter, his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) contributed funds, and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the first Tokugawa shogun, exempted the shrine town of Yawata from taxation.

The elaborate two-storied *romon* gate that comprises the front of the main shrine is where visitors usually pray. Extending from the gate are covered corridors that enclose the buildings within. Past the gate is the prayer hall where the priests perform rituals, which is in turn connected to the shrine's main sanctuary. All the structures are painted bright vermilion and decorated with over 150 colorful woodcarvings of plants, animals, and mythical creatures.

The main sanctuary of Iwashimizu Hachimangu is characteristic of the *hachiman-zukuri* architecture style. It looks like two separate buildings connected by a passageway, but is comprised of a single structure with two gabled roofs. The interior is divided into an outer hall and an inner hall, each containing three rooms side by side, one for each enshrined deity. It is believed that the deities occupy the outer hall during daily worship and retire to the inner hall for rest.

Guided tours of the main shrine are conducted by shrine priests and include details about the shrine and local legends. Please note that tours are usually held in Japanese.