

Gorinto Pagoda (Seafaring Monument)

A large, five-tier stone pagoda called a *gorinto* stands at the foot of Mt. Otokoyama not far from Iwashimizu Hachimangu Shrine. The pagoda is 6 meters tall, making it one of the biggest in Japan, and is nationally designated an Important Cultural Property.

A *gorinto* is a type of Buddhist pagoda that was introduced in Japan during the mid-Heian period (794–1185). They are most often made of stone, and their shape symbolizes the five elements believed to make up the universe. From bottom to top, the cube, sphere, pyramid, hemisphere, and jewel shape represent earth, water, fire, air, and ether (or void), respectively. Smaller versions of these pagodas often serve as grave markers or memorial towers and are common in Buddhist temples and cemeteries.

This *gorinto* was built in the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Unlike most other *gorinto*, it bears no inscriptions, so the purpose of its creation is unknown. According to the most popular tale, a merchant returning from China around the year 1175 was caught in a violent storm at sea. Fearing for his life, he prayed to the deity Hachiman for protection and miraculously made it to shore. In gratitude to the deity who answered his prayer, the merchant erected a large stone pagoda. Based on this story, the pagoda is also sometimes called the Seafaring Monument. Other legends suggest that it marks the grave of Gyokyo, the founder of Iwashimizu Hachimangu, that it is a memorial to the spirit of samurai warriors, or that it serves as a pilgrimage site for praying after the mourning period for deceased family members.