

## **Obara Jinja Shrine**

Obara Jinja is a Shinto shrine venerating the primordial being Izanami no Mikoto, the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami, and the moon god Tsukuyomi no Mikoto. Because these are the kami (deities) of creation, the shrine is an auspicious place for protecting mothers and children during childbirth, and is often visited by expecting families. Obara Jinja was established in 852, and has a large collection of *ema* (votive tablets), the oldest of which has been dated to 1599. The shrine, its affiliated buildings, and the *ubuya* (house for childbirth) located across the river are designated Cultural Properties of Kyoto Prefecture.

The *ubuya* is a very small thatched hut, barely large enough to crouch in. It faces the shrine to receive the blessings of kami during childbirth, and is built next to a river; this is symbolic of the division the river creates between this world and the otherworld in Japanese belief, as childbirth is said to happen between the two worlds. *Ubuya* existed in Japan as early as the Nara period (710–794), and were used in this region from at least the 1600s, continuing to around 1900. This is one of the very few remaining *ubuya* nationwide.

Although *ubuya* are no longer in use, the ground is considered sacred. Obara Jinja offers charms for safe childbirth containing sand from the floor of the hut.