

Saka Jinja Shrine

Saka Jinja is a Shinto shrine that commemorates the first brewing of sake. According to legend, many gods gathered along the banks of a nearby river, built a kitchen, and began to prepare food and drink—sake in particular—for a drunken party that lasted many days. The name “Saka” is derived from “sake,” and to this day the liquor is brewed within the shrine precincts. An important event called the Doburoku Festival is held at the shrine every year on October 13. The head priest brews *doburoku* (unrefined sake), and sake brewers from all over Shimane Prefecture assemble to drink it and pray for a good year. Sake is made from the fermentation of rice, and Saka Jinja enshrines gods of fermentation in general—including the god of soy sauce. Because of the growing popularity of sake around the world, Saka Jinja has seen an increasing number of visitors from overseas in recent years, particularly on the day of the Doburoku Festival in October.

The Devotional Sake Barrel

The shrine stands atop a hill, and although it can be accessed by road, most visitors pass under the stone torii gateway at the base of the hill and climb the long staircase to the site. Only the shrine priests may enter the small *honden* main hall. Made of unpainted cedar wood, it is raised on wooden posts in a style called *taisha zukuri*. In front of the *honden* stands a small prayer hall called the *haiden*, where worshippers gather for ceremonies. The priests perform their rituals in a small adjoining anteroom that has steps leading to the doors of the *honden*. It is furnished with traditional altar tables, lanterns, and a mirror symbolizing the gods, as well as devotional offerings—most notably a large barrel of sake, a feature unique to this shrine. Several miniature shrines also stand on the shrine grounds, including one called Eki Jinja, devoted to the god of contagious diseases.