

Gion Shrine

The natural cave that now houses the Gion Shrine has been a site of worship since ancient times. Its location by the entrance to the old Aburatsu harbor explains its spiritual significance: throughout history, ports have been associated with flooding, infectious disease, and other misfortunes. In ancient Japan, such calamities were often believed to be the doing of angry dragon deities, whose wrath needed to be appeased. In Aburatsu, such rituals took place in this cave. A Shinto shrine was built in the cave in 1924, championed by a local railway executive. The Gion Shrine is affiliated with Yasaka Shrine in Kyoto, the home of the annual Gion Festival, and enshrines Susanoo, the god of storms. This deity, who is believed to protect devotees from pestilence and the wrath of the sea, is noted for slaying perhaps the most famous “dragon” in Japanese mythology: the eight-headed serpent Yamata no Orochi, from whose tail Susanoo is said to have pulled the sword now worshiped as one of the three Imperial Regalia of Japan.