

## **Honden and Gonden Sanctuaries**

The main shrine area of Kamigamo Jinja is built around two identical sanctuaries standing side by side, the Honden (Main Sanctuary) and the Gonden (Temporary Sanctuary). The Honden on the right is where the deity Kamo Wakeikazuchi no Okami is enshrined and where the majority of rituals are carried out. For particularly important rites, the doors to the Honden are opened and a high-ranking priest goes inside to place offerings on the sacred altar for the enshrined deity. The Gonden on the left is primarily used to temporarily enshrine Kamo Wakeikazuchi no Okami when the Honden is under repair.

### *Nagare-Zukuri Architecture Style*

The Honden and the Gonden are constructed in a classic Shinto architecture style called *nagare-zukuri*, which is characterized by an asymmetrical gabled roof that extends further over the front than over the back. Approximately 60 percent of Shinto shrines are built in this architecture style, and Kamigamo Jinja exemplifies an older form of *nagare-zukuri* characteristic of the Heian period (794–1185). It is unknown when the very first *nagare-zukuri* structures were erected at Kamigamo Jinja; the current Honden and Gonden date to 1863. Both sanctuaries are designated National Treasures.

### *Shikinen Sengu Ritual Reconstruction*

Every 21 years, Kamigamo Jinja enters a ritual reconstruction period called *shikinen sengu*. Historically, prominent shrines would rebuild all their sacred structures at designated intervals to keep them “pure” and ever-new, but most have discontinued the practice due to high cost. In modern times, *shikinen sengu* at Kamigamo Jinja involves repairs and maintenance on shrine buildings without complete reconstruction. If work is being done on the Honden during this period, the deity Kamo Wakeikazuchi no Okami is temporarily transferred to the Gonden.

### *Sacred Guardians*

Both the Honden and the Gonden are protected by paired statues and paintings of sacred guardians, a mythical *komainu* beast on the left and a *karajishi* lion on the right. Reflecting the yin-yang philosophy adapted by Kamigamo Jinja since ancient times, the *komainu* in each pair is silver, symbolizing the moon and yin energy, and the *karajishi* is gold, symbolizing the sun and yang energy. In modern times, pairs of guardian statues at Shinto shrines usually feature two *komainu*, but the combination of *komainu* and *karajishi* guardians at Kamigamo Jinja represents an older tradition. The paintings on the walls of

the two sanctuaries were originally done by artists from the Kano school, which was preeminent in the Edo period (1603–1867).