

## **Shrine Grounds (2)**

### **Hosodono Hall**

The Hosodono Hall is easily recognized by two large sand cones located in front. The cones, called *tatesuna*, represent the nearby Mt. Koyama, the sacred mountain where the deity Kamo Wakeikazuchi no Okami is said to have descended to earth. Pine needles inserted into the peak of each cone symbolize evergreen trees on top of the mountain. The left cone has three needles (an odd number), and the right cone has two (an even number). This reflects the principles of yin and yang that are used in *onmyodo*, the traditional esoteric cosmology historically practiced by the Kamo clan, the founders of Kamigamo Jinja.

The Hosodono was originally an open-air building with a hip-and-gable roof, but at a later point wooden outer walls were added to the structure. The walls are removed in the first half of May for the Kamo Festival (Aoi Festival) and on September 9th for the Choyo Ritual and Karasuzumo wrestling, offering a view of the hall as it appeared in its early history. Documents show that a Hosodono existed at the location in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), and the current Heian-style hall was built in 1628 based on historical records from the Muromachi period (1336–1573). The Hosodono is a nationally designated Important Cultural Property.

Historically, the Hosodono was used to host the emperor and other high-ranked visitors before they went to pray at the main sanctuary. At present, the hall is used for religious rites, particularly during the Karasuzumo event on September 9th. When children compete in sumo wrestling matches in front of the Hosodono, the Saiodai (the honorary shrine priestess who takes part in select rituals) and her companions, all wearing elaborate Heian-period robes, watch the bouts from the hall.

The Hosodono is closed to the public and can only be observed from the outside. The hall is sometimes used for Shinto wedding ceremonies and musical performances. In December and January, two large votive tablets depicting the Zodiac animal for the coming year are displayed on either side of the steps leading into the Hosodono.

### **Hashidono Hall**

The Hashidono Hall is an open-air structure that spans the Nara no Ogawa Stream and is used for various rituals, festivals, and sacred dances. The name “Hashidono” combines

the kanji characters for “bridge” and “worship hall,” while an alternative name, “Maidono,” replaces “bridge” with “dance,” referring to the hall’s use as a stage. Records show that a worship hall existed at the location in the Kamakura period (1185–1333), and the current structure with a hip-and-gable roof supported by wooden pillars was built in 1628. The Hashidono is a nationally designated Important Cultural Property.

Several annual ceremonies take place at the Hashidono. During the Kamo Festival (Aoi Festival) held on May 15th, a *chokushi* (imperial messenger) sits in the hall facing the main shrine area to read an address to the deity Kamo Wakeikazuchi no Okami on behalf of the emperor. A purification rite called Nagoshi no Oharae takes place at the Hashidono in the evening of June 30th, when Shinto priests chant prayers and scatter thousands of small paper dolls from the edge of the hall into the stream below.

The Hashidono is closed to the public, but visitors may cross one of the bridges on either side to appreciate the hall’s architecture and the surrounding landscape.

### **Shinmesha (Stable of the Sacred Horse)**

Near the second torii gate of Kamigamo Jinja, along the path toward the main shrine area, is a stable that houses the sacred horse (*shinme*). The horse is dedicated to the shrine to serve as a divine messenger for the deity Kamo Wakeikazuchi no Okami. It was once common for Shinto shrines to keep sacred horses on the grounds, but most discontinued the practice due to the extensive care required.

In modern times, only white horses are chosen to be the *shinme* of Kamigamo Jinja. The “duties” of the sacred horse include greeting shrine visitors and participating in certain festivals and ceremonies. For example, during the Hakuba Soran (“sacred horse inspection”) ritual on January 7th, the horse wears ceremonial tack and is walked through the grounds to pay respects to the deity at the main sanctuary. Seeing the sacred horse during this event is believed to ward off bad luck for the year.

Outside of shrine events, visitors to Kamigamo Jinja can meet the *shinme* on Sundays and public holidays from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. During this time, they may give the sacred horse slices of carrots that are provided at the stable.

Rules for interacting with the sacred horse:

- No flash photography.

- Please be quiet.
- Do not touch the horse on the head.
- Offer carrots from the plate, not your hands.

### **Shokei'en Garden**

The Shokei'en Garden on the eastern side of Kamigamo Jinja grounds is designed around a winding stream. The layout is inspired by a garden style that was popular in the Heian period (794–1185), a peaceful era characterized by flourishing arts and culture centered upon the imperial court. The garden was created in 1960 by the renowned landscape architect Nakane Kinsaku (1917–1995) in celebration of the birth of Emperor Naruhito. The Shokei'en features bright iris flowers in spring and colorful maple leaves in autumn. A large, 300-year-old tree in the center is believed to bless families with happiness because it consists of several trunks that grow from a single root system.

Another feature of the Shokei'en Garden is a large, curiously shaped boulder in the corner. The stone is called Onmyoseki ("yin and yang stone") and appears as if two halves have melded into one piece. The name refers to *onmyodo*, a traditional esoteric cosmology historically used in Japan for divination. Another name of the stone is Negai-ishi, or "wishing stone." Visitors usually place hands on both halves of the stone to make a wish and then pray at the nearby Kamo Yamaguchi Jinja Shrine (also known as Sawada Jinja).

A poetry-writing event called Kamo Kyokusui no En ("winding stream banquet") is held in the Shokei'en Garden in April. It is a modern reenactment of a poetry competition between nobles that was hosted in 1182 by Kamo Shigeyasu, the head priest of Kamigamo Jinja at that time and a renowned poet himself. During the event, prominent tanka poets in ornate Heian-style court attire sit on the banks of the meandering stream and compose poems based on the theme chosen for the year. Small wooden boats are floated along the water, carrying cups of *sake* to the competitors as they write. Historically, poets would attempt to complete the composition before the *sake* cup arrived. When the writing is complete, each participant submits one poem to be recited as an offering to the deity of Kamigamo Jinja.

### **Mt. Koyama**

Mt. Koyama is integral to the history of Kamigamo Jinja as the place where the deity Kamo Wakeikazuchi no Okami is said to have descended to earth. According to shrine

legend, Kamo Wakeikazuchi no Okami was the divine son of a high-ranking woman from the Kamo clan. After he ascended to the heavens during his coming-of-age ritual, his mother prayed to meet him once more. The deity then appeared in her dreams, giving instructions on how to welcome him. When the required offerings were prepared and rituals were held, Kamo Wakeikazuchi no Okami manifested on Mt. Koyama in an adult form. This is considered the origin of both Kamigamo Jinja and the Kamo Festival (also known as the Aoi Festival), the shrine's most important ceremony.

Mt. Koyama is located about 2 kilometers north of Kamigamo Jinja and is clearly visible from the path near the shrine office. On the main shrine grounds, the sacred mountain is represented by the twin *tatesuna* sand cones in front of the Hosodono Hall. Artifacts discovered in the area around Mt. Koyama during archeological excavations date to the Jomon period (10,000–300 BCE), indicating that people have dwelled there since ancient times.

Please note that hiking on Mt. Koyama is not allowed.