

### **Shōmen Sandō (Main Approach Path)**

The wide path leading from the road to the main shrines of Sumiyoshi Taisha is called the Shōmen Sandō. A *sandō* (literally, the path or “way” to worship) is the main approach to a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple; *shōmen* means “front.” Walking the *sandō* is a visitor’s first act of worship, signifying the transition from the secular to the sacred.

Sumiyoshi Taisha was closely connected with the aristocracy of the Japanese classical period (550–1185), and it appears in many literary works of the time. In her eleventh-century classic *The Tale of Genji*, Lady Murasaki Shikibu (970?–1019?) has her protagonist, Prince Genji, visit Sumiyoshi Taisha. He thanks the shrine’s gods for protecting him during a period of disgrace and self-exile on the Suma coast in what is today the city of Kobe. In her description of the shrine, she praises the beauty of the pine trees that grew along the shore just in front of the Shōmen Sandō, noting that white-capped waves could be seen through their branches. The scene is a reminder of Sumiyoshi Taisha’s close links with the sea—the shrine was located on the edge of Osaka Bay until silt buildup and land reclamation moved the shoreline westward.