

## History

Sumiyoshi Taisha spiritually protects the port of Osaka and the old imperial capitals of Nara and Kyoto further inland. In the nearly 2,000 years since it was founded, its devotees have included monarchs, poets, seafarers, traders, and millions of other people.

According to traditional histories, Sumiyoshi Taisha was established in 211 by empress-regent Jingū, who governed Japan after the death of her husband. Jingū dedicated the shrine to three gods of the sea, Sokotsutsuno-o no Mikoto, Nakatsutsuno-o no Mikoto, and Uwatsutsuno-o no Mikoto, who are collectively called the Sumiyoshi Sanjin. The names of these deities contain words meaning “bottom,” “middle,” and “surface,” suggesting that each had its own place in the depths of the sea. According to another theory, they also may represent the three bright stars of Orion’s belt, which were used by navigators. After empress-regent Jingū died, she was enshrined at Sumiyoshi as the deity Okinagatarashihime no Mikoto.

Sumiyoshi Taisha was built on the shores of Osaka Bay, but natural silt buildup and land reclamation slowly pushed the shoreline westward. Between the seventh and ninth centuries, Naniwa harbor near the shrine was the departure point for trade and diplomatic missions to the Asian mainland. Later, during the Edo period (1603–1867), the port of Osaka was the base for an important domestic trade route linking central Japan with communities on the Japan Sea coast.

Over the years, the focus of worship at Sumiyoshi Taisha has expanded beyond the original maritime gods. The shrine is associated with poetry, the performing arts, sumo wrestling, and success in business and love. “Sumiyossan,” as Osaka residents affectionately call it, appears in many Japanese stories—from ancient folktales to modern literature. A memorial on the grounds honors Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972), the Nobel Prize–winning author who set a short story at the shrine.

The main buildings at Sumiyoshi Taisha are distinguished by their simplicity. Their straight-edged gable roofs and other features pre-date the arrival of more elaborate architectural influences from the Asian mainland. The style is called *sumiyoshi-zukuri* and became a model for shrine builders elsewhere in Japan.

Originally, Sumiyoshi Taisha’s four main shrines were rebuilt every 20 years. The practice was interrupted by civil war in the sixteenth century and was abandoned entirely in the early nineteenth. The current four main sanctuaries of the shrine were built in 1810 and are designated as National Treasures. Many of the other structures in the shrine grounds—including the stone stage completed in the early seventeenth-century—are designated Important Cultural Properties.