

## **Kaguraden (Sacred Dance Hall)**

The Kaguraden is a ceremonial space designed to host large group rituals, weddings, and performances. The hall was first built in 1667, but was rebuilt in its current form in 1981 to commemorate the centennial of Izumo Ōyashiro-kyō, a religious organization that promotes worship of the shrine's main deity, Ōkununushi no Kami.

A massive straw rope known as the "Ō-shimenawa" hangs in front of the Kaguraden. It is the largest in Japan, measuring 13.6 meters in length, 8 meters in girth, and weighing 5.2 metric tons. *Shimenawa* are sacred straw ropes that mark the boundary between sacred and profane space. The various *shimenawa* at Izumo Ōyashiro are unique in that the two strands forming the rope are twisted together beginning on the left (facing the hall), while those at other shrines begin on the right. The direction can be told from the bluntness of the rope ends on the left, compared to the narrower, tapering ends on the right. The Kaguraden's great *shimenawa* is replaced every six to eight years and is woven by a group of volunteers from Iinai in central Shimane Prefecture.

Passing under the *shimenawa*, visitors will see a large stained-glass window depicting the shrine crest and the multi-colored clouds symbolic of Izumo. This is a rare sight, as stained glass is not typical of shrine architecture.

Despite its name, the Kaguraden of Izumo Ōyashiro does not hold performances of kagura (sacred dance). Instead, it was originally constructed as a venue for unique rituals passed down through the shrine's family of chief priests (*kokusō*). Today, the Kaguraden hosts weddings and prayer services for the general public.