

An Overview of Izumo Ōyashiro Shrine

Izumo Ōyashiro Shrine (also called Izumo Taisha Shrine) is one of the most important shrines in Japan. The main deity worshipped at the shrine is Ōkuninushi no Kami (“Great Lord of the Land”), who is associated with nation building and *en-musubi* (“tying of bonds between people”). *En-musubi* is frequently equated with romantic relationships and marriage, but the meaning of the term is much broader. Ōkuninushi serves as the protector of connections between people—whether those relationships are at home, at work, or in the larger community.

While the exact date of Izumo Ōyashiro’s founding is uncertain, the shrine is mentioned in several of the country’s oldest written records, including the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*), the *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicle of Japan*), and the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* (*Gazetteer of Izumo Province*). All three of these texts date from the early eighth century, attesting to the long-standing significance of Izumo Ōyashiro in the country’s history. In fact, it is said that nearly a third of the mythological accounts included in the *Kojiki* are set within the Izumo region.

The shrine traces its origin to the *kuni-yuzuri* (“relinquishing the land”) myth recorded in these early texts. The story begins with Ōkuninushi governing the earthly realm, where he has worked for long years to develop agricultural techniques and medicines. Observing the land from Takamanohara (“the plain of high heaven”), the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami decides that the land should be ruled by her descendants. Ōkuninushi agrees to cede control with the understanding that a grand shrine will be built in his honor.

The main structures of Izumo Ōyashiro have been rebuilt many times since the shrine’s founding. It is said that early versions of the Honden (main sanctuary) may have towered 48 meters above the landscape. The tenth-century educational text *Kuchizusami* describes Izumo Ōyashiro as the largest building in the country, taller than the Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall) at Tōdaiji Temple in Nara and the Daigokuden, an administrative building of the imperial court in Kyoto. During this period, the shrine was called Kizuki no Ōyashiro Shrine.

Between the medieval period (1185 through the end of the sixteenth century) and the early part of the Edo period (1603–1867), the main sanctuary underwent several changes in appearance; for a time it was painted bright red. The current Honden dates to renovations completed in 1744, which returned the structure to its original unpainted exterior.

In 1871, the shrine’s name was changed from Kizuki no Ōyashiro to Izumo Ōyashiro in recognition of its ancient regional and mythological associations. Today, the shrine attracts millions of annual visitors seeking Ōkuninushi’s blessing in relationships, and many others who are drawn by its long and complex history.

