

Norikura Hongū Shrine

The main sanctuary of Norikura Hongū Shrine is located at the top of Mt. Kengamine (3,026 m), Mt. Norikura's highest peak. It is an ancient spiritual site, revered by centuries of pilgrims and hikers. The simple wooden structure enshrines Amaterasu Ōmikami, goddess of the sun and the most important Shinto deity. Amaterasu is thought to protect those who climb to the summit and pay homage at the shrine. Many hikers ascend before dawn to watch the sunrise and feel the deity's presence as the sun's first rays light up the mountaintop.

Originally known as Kuragamine Shrine, Norikura Hongū Shrine has existed in some form for over 800 years. In 1181, a retainer of the renowned military commander Kiso Yoshinaka (1154–1184) climbed the peak and enshrined a golden statue there, praying for luck in the Genpei War. Ascetic priest, poet, and sculptor Enkū (1632–1695) is also said to have climbed the peak to offer his prayers. The shrine was renamed Norikura Hongū Shrine in 1949, the same year the current structure was built.

The hike from Norikura Bus Terminal to Norikura Hongū Shrine takes approximately 1.5 to 2 hours, roughly 3 hours roundtrip. Alternatively, visitors can pay their respects without climbing Mt. Kengamine. Within the bus terminal parking area is another small shrine—Norikura Hongū's *yōhaisho*, a worship site created for those unable to make it to the mountain peak. Also known as Naka no Yashiro ("middle shrine"), it was built in 1953 to offer prayers for the safety of climbers and visitors to Norikura. The current structure dates to 1974.