

Hie Jinja Shrine

Hie Jinja is a Shinto shrine at the base of the mountainside temple complex. The shrine was built when Yamadera was founded as a tribute to Mt. Hiei, the sacred peak on which the headquarters of the Tendai Buddhist school is located. Hie Jinja is dedicated to Sanno Gongen, the guardian deity of Yamadera's Mt. Hoju, and Mt. Hiei. A *gongen* is the manifestation of a Buddhist deity (such as a buddha or bodhisattva) in the form of a Shinto deity (*kami*), and the shrine is a reminder of the fusion of Buddhism and Shinto that existed before the Meiji era (1868–1912). An enormous 1,000-year-old ginkgo tree thought to have been planted by Yamadera's founder, Ennin (794–864), towers in front of the shrine building. The tree is a Natural Monument.

Hie Jinja is perhaps best known for its Sanno Matsuri, an annual festival held on May 17. During the festival, three *mikoshi* portable shrines from Hie Shrine are carried to the streets below the temple complex accompanied by traditional music. The event culminates with the *mikoshi* bearers dashing through the streets before returning to Hie Jinja. Unlike most events, rain is considered a good omen for the Sanno Matsuri. Legend suggests that if even three drops of water fall on the *mikoshi*, there will be a bountiful harvest for the coming year.