

Nishi Hongū (Western Main Shrine)

Nishi Hongū is the highest ranking of the seven shrines that make up Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine. It enshrines the deity Ōnamuchi no kami, one of the protectors of Japan, and occupies the site of the first permanent religious structure erected on Mt. Hiei. The shrine was built in approximately 668 in conjunction with Emperor Tenji's (626–672) construction of a new palace near Lake Biwa.

The current main sanctuary was built in 1586, after the armies of the warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) burned the original structure to the ground in 1571. The architectural style used, called *hie-zukuri*, has several characteristics rarely seen at other shrines. For example, the main sanctuary's first floor is high enough above the foundation to allow for a low-ceilinged room below. This room was used for Buddhist worship until the second half of the nineteenth century, but is now only used occasionally for special services.

The main sanctuary is designated a National Treasure.