

## Karasaki Jinja Shrine

Karasaki is a small promontory on the western shore of Lake Biwa, not far from where the imperial court was located from 667 to 672. According to legend, the deity Ōnamuchi landed ashore here one day in a fishing boat, having traveled from Miwa (in present-day Nara Prefecture). He asked Koto no Mitachi Ushimaru, a warrior who lived on Karasaki, where he could find a suitable dwelling place. Ushimaru told Ōnamuchi that the lapping of the waves sounded like the murmuring of verses from the *Nirvana Sutra*. Ōnamuchi sailed out into the lake to hear the waves for himself, and when he returned, he flew his boat up into the boughs of a large pine tree. Seeing this miracle, Ushimaru suggested that Ōnamuchi would find a suitable location on Mt. Hiei, and that he, Ushimaru, would follow him there, build a shrine for him, and serve as the shrine's priest. The hall built by Ushimaru was the first structure to enshrine a deity on Mt. Hiei. Other deities were already believed to dwell on the mountain, but they were enshrined in natural objects such as large boulders or trees. Over the next 1,400 years, that first hall was rebuilt many times and is now the main sanctuary of Nishi Hongū (Western Main Shrine) and part of Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine.

Karasaki Jinja Shrine was established in 692 on the Karasaki promontory. Although it is separate from Hiyoshi Taisha, it has a special relationship to the shrine as the site of the divine revelation that led to Hiyoshi Taisha's founding.

Karasaki Jinja enshrines Ushimaru's wife, Wakesuki-hime no Mikoto. She is known for healing gynecological disorders and sexually transmitted diseases. The shrine precincts are the location for one of the closing events of the three-day Sannō Festival in April. During this event the seven Hiyoshi Taisha *mikoshi* portable shrines are brought to Karasaki Jinja by barge, reenacting the arrival of Ōnamuchi.

Behind the shrine stands a remarkable pine tree. It is believed to be the third-generation descendant of the tree from whose branches Ōnamuchi spoke to Ushimaru. The pines of Karasaki appear across Japanese art and poetry, including in a poem from the eighth-century collection *Man'yōshū* and in the works of the haiku poet Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694). Bashō's poem about the second-generation pine is inscribed on both a stone stele and a wooden plaque posted near the current tree. The second-generation tree was also the subject of one of the iconic *Eight Views of Omi* by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858).