

Great Golden Rock, Sannomiya Shrine, and Ushiogū Shrine

The boulder near the summit of Mt. Hachiōji was named the “Great Golden Rock” because of the way it glows in the morning sun. The name first appears in the eighth-century chronicle *Kojiki*. Originally, the rock was the abode of the deity Ōyamakui no kami, and it is considered the first place where a deity was enshrined within the Hiyoshi Taisha shrine precincts. During an earthquake in 1662, a large piece of the rock face broke away and rolled down the mountain to its current location near the road that leads up to the summit of Mt. Hachiōji.

Flanking the Great Golden Rock are two shrines built on top of platforms projecting from the side of the mountain, much like Kiyomizudera Temple in Kyoto. The shrines were built in a modified *gongen-zukuri* style, in which both main sanctuary and worship hall are joined under a single roof. The shrines look out over Lake Biwa, and on clear days, Mt. Mikami (nicknamed Ōmi Fuji) can be seen in the distance beyond the lake.

The two shrines are believed to be the dwelling places of the violent manifestations of two deities. Left of the rock is Sannomiya Shrine, where the female deity Kamotamayorihime is enshrined. People pray to her for safe childbirth, the well-being of children, good health, and a long life. To the right is Ushiogū Shrine, where the male deity Ōyamakui is enshrined. People pray to him for the protection of mountains and forests, flood control, civil engineering, and for household health and prosperity. The deities’ gentle counterparts are enshrined in Jugegū Shrine and Higashi Hongū (Eastern Main Shrine), respectively.

These two deities are thought to be betrothed and are brought together once a year during the Sannō Festival, when they are reunited at Higashi Hongū. In preparation for the festival, their portable *mikoshi* shrines are carried up the mountain and placed in these two halls on the first Sunday in March. This marks the beginning of a symbolic “courtship period,” and lanterns on the exterior of each shrine are lit during this time. On the night of April 12, the two *mikoshi* are carried down the mountain at breakneck speed to Higashi Hongū.

Both Sannomiya and Ushiogū are designated Important Cultural Properties.