

## Seven Shrines

Hiyoshi Taisha's seven major shrines are divided into two groups, one clustered in the west portion of the shrine precincts and the other in the east. The names of the shrines and identities of the deities enshrined within have changed on several occasions over the centuries. The current configuration of shrine names and deities dates from approximately 1869, following an edict to "clarify" religious sites by separating Shinto from Buddhism. Shinto and Buddhism were previously practiced together at religious sites throughout Japan, including at Hiyoshi Taisha. Under the separation edict, Buddhist practices were banned, and Buddhist objects were removed from Hiyoshi Taisha and destroyed, leading to a reconfiguration of the deities and a reimagining of ritual practices.

### The Number Seven

The major shrines are not the only things at Hiyoshi Taisha that total seven. There are seven steps in each of the staircases of the main sanctuaries, and all the *komainu* guardian dogs in front of the halls have seven tails.

According to Tendai Buddhism, the seven shrines of Hiyoshi Taisha are a manifestation of the seven stars that make up the Big Dipper constellation. The Big Dipper is thought to determine the life spans of emperors and all other sentient beings.

### Western Cluster

The western cluster contains the highest-ranking shrine at Hiyoshi Taisha, Nishi Hongū, along with two smaller shrines: Usagū Shrine and Shirayamahime Shrine. The area is the main location for ceremonies held on the last day of the Sannō Festival. Monks from Enryakuji Temple on Mt. Hiei visit Nishi Hongū to present offerings, and the chief abbot recites the *Heart Sutra* before the Hiyoshi Taisha deities.

### Nishi Hongū (Western Main Shrine)

Until 1868, this shrine was called Ōmiya Shrine, or "great shrine," and it is still the highest-ranking shrine at Hiyoshi Taisha. The deity enshrined in the main sanctuary is Ōnamuchi, also known as Ōkununushi, the leader of the earthly deities and a descendant of Ōyamakui no kami, the deity enshrined in Higashi Hongū (Eastern Main Shrine). Ōnamuchi, who has been venerated in the Yamato region (now Nara Prefecture) since the seventh century, has strong ties to the ancient Japanese court and is considered one of the divine protectors of Japan.

The main sanctuary is designated a National Treasure.

### Usagū Shrine

Usagū Shrine is located just to the east of Nishi Hongū. The deity venerated there is Tagorihime, the wife of Ōnamuchi, the deity enshrined in Nishi Hongū. The same Tagorihime is enshrined at Usa Hachimangū Shrine in Oita Prefecture, where she is venerated along with her two sisters. All three are children of the deities Susanoo and Amaterasu.

*Tachibana* orange trees, which are considered a symbol of perpetual youth and longevity, stand to either side of the main sanctuary. A *tachibana* tree paired with a cherry tree is a customary decoration among the tiered rows of dolls displayed on Girls' Day (March 3).

### **Shirayamahime Shrine**

Just east of Usagū Shrine is Shirayamahime Shrine, where the deity Kukurihime is venerated. Kukurihime is the deity of Mt. Hakusan on the border between Gifu and Ishikawa Prefectures. She appears in the eighth-century chronicle *Nihon shoki* as the intermediary during a clash between the creator deities Izanagi and Izanami.

### **Eastern Cluster**

The eastern cluster comprises four shrines: two near the summit of Mt. Hachiōji and two on the plain below. The deities enshrined are a divine couple who have gentle and violent manifestations. The violent manifestations are enshrined on the mountaintop, while the gentle versions are in the shrines below. The two deities are considered betrothed, and their union, along with the birth of their divine child, is the focus of the Sannō Festival held in April.

### **Higashi Hongū (Eastern Main Shrine)**

Higashi Hongū is the second-highest-ranking shrine at Hiyoshi Taisha. It is sometimes called by its earlier name, Ninomiya, meaning “second shrine.” The deity enshrined in the main sanctuary is the gentle manifestation of Ōyamakui, an ancestor of the deity Ōnamuchi.

The main sanctuary is designated a National Treasure.

### **Ushiogū Shrine**

Ushiogū Shrine is located near the summit of Mt. Hachiōji. The enshrined deity is the violent manifestation of Ōyamakui, whose gentle manifestation is enshrined in Higashi Hongū.

### **Jugegū Shrine**

Jugegū Shrine is located on a site that was considered sacred long before shrine structures were ever built on the mountain. The main sanctuary was built over a natural spring at the base of Mt. Hachiōji. The mountain itself is considered a *shintaisan* (a mountain where a deity dwells), and the deity Hachiōji is thought to reside in a rock near the summit.

The deity enshrined in the main sanctuary of Jugegū, however, is not Hachiōji but the gentle manifestation of Kamotamayorihime, a daughter of the chieftain of the Kamo shrines in Kyoto and mother to Kamo Wakeikazuchi, Ōyamakui's son.

### **Sannomiya Shrine**

Sannomiya Shrine is located near the summit of Mt. Hachiōji. The enshrined deity is the violent manifestation of Kamotamayorihime.