

Kashima Jinja Shrine

This shrine, believed to grant once-in-a-lifetime wishes, attracts visitors from across Japan who want to pay homage and petition for their one wish. Many people visit during the New Year's holiday to make wishes for the coming year, or ahead of the annual period of university entrance examinations, in January, to wish for success.

In hopes of having their wish granted, visitors can perform *shinden mawari* (going around the *honden* or main sanctuary), whereby they walk around the *honden* as many times as their age. Sticks are available to keep track of the number of loops. Visitors are invited to pick up as many as their age; they put one back each time they complete a loop, so their hands are empty when they have completed the correct number of circuits. They can also touch the *nazuri* (wishing stone); the colorful origami crane chains hanging down the side of the building are still another way of making wishes.

The shrine was built about 700 years ago, but has been rebuilt and altered over the centuries. Extensive work has since been carried out to preserve the shrine's key characteristics. The giant torii gate is made of titanium, symbolizing the great hope the shrine holds for the future while maintaining its historic traditions. It is the fifth-largest torii in Japan.

Kashima Jinja Shrine is located near Kashima Ogidaira Natural Park, where more than 2,000 cherry trees bloom from late March to early April. Halfway up the north slope of the park is a rock where hawks have long built their nests. The rock, called Taka-no-Su (hawks' nest), is 23 meters high and 37 meters across. A panorama of Awaji and Shodo islands and other islands nearby in the Seto Inland Sea can be viewed from the park.