

Tamaki Shrine

(看板)

This ancient shrine at the summit of Mt. Tamaki (1,076 m) is one of Japan's oldest sacred sites. It is believed to have been founded in 37 BCE during the reign of the legendary Emperor Sujin as an act of piety to protect his castle from fires and evil spirits. It has long been a revered spot for practitioners of Shugendo, an ascetic tradition that embraces elements of Shinto and Buddhism along with the ancient worship of natural phenomena. Beginning in the Heian period (794–1185), Mt. Tamaki flourished as a training center for this syncretic religion and was an important stop on the ascetic training course that became the Omine Okugakemichi pilgrimage route.

After the Japanese government imposed the separation of Shinto and Buddhism during the Meiji era (1868–1912), most Buddhist structures on shrine grounds were destroyed, but at Tamaki Shrine elements of its temple past were repurposed or retained. Today this sacred spot, which includes not only the shrine but also the mountain and forests around it, is visited by worshipers from all over Japan for purification and healing. In 2004, Tamaki Shrine was registered as a World Heritage Site as part of the “Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range.”

Note: The shrine is presently undergoing a long-term restoration of some of its buildings and artifacts. Some areas may be inaccessible.

[NOTE: The following is for use with numbers or symbols indicating their location on the adjacent map.]

Major Structures and Features

Main Hall: This 200-year-old building is constructed of *keyaki* (zelkova) wood. It houses the shrine's main deities, including Kunitokotachi no Mikoto (the first deity to appear when the Earth and the heavens were created), Izanagi no Mikoto, Izanami no Mikoto, and Amaterasu Omikami, the sun goddess.

Mihashira Shrine: The three deities housed in this auxiliary shrine are worshiped for protection from various ailments and for maritime safety.

Tamaishi Shrine: This subordinate shrine, located halfway between the Main Hall and the peak of Mt. Tamaki, has no built structure, reflecting the tradition of nature worship in ancient Japan. It consists of a partially buried black rock surrounded by white pebbles set in an enclosure among Japanese cedars. This is thought to be the origin of Tamaki Shrine, and is revered as a power spot.

Shrine Office and Kitchen: This structure was built in 1804 as the main hall and kitchen of a Buddhist temple within the shrine complex. The interior sliding doors are decorated with acclaimed late Edo-period paintings of flora and fauna. It is designated an Important Cultural Property.

Omikoshiden: A *mikoshi*, or portable shrine, is housed here except during the annual festival on October 24, when it is paraded through the shrine grounds.

Giant Cedar Trees: The shrine grounds have a number of ancient *sugi* (Japanese cedar) trees, thanks to a long prohibition on logging in this sacred area. These include the 3,000-year-old Jindai-sugi; the O-sugi, 50 meters high with a circumference of 11 meters; and the Meoto-sugi, two massive trees joined at the trunk (*meoto* means "wedded").