

Omiya-jinja Shrine

Omiya Jinja Shrine is dedicated to the guardian deity of Mt. Aso and the legendary Emperor Keiko, who is said to have lived in the first and second centuries CE. According to legend, the people of Yamaga brought torches to aid the emperor's passage along the Kikuchi River while he was on a pilgrimage to Kyushu. These torches eventually came to be represented by paper lanterns, which are now found throughout the city.

Omiya Jinja Shrine's main hall is the site of many important rituals of the annual Yamaga Lantern Festival in August, including the Agari Toro ceremony, which date from the Muromachi period (1336–1573).

Exhibits of the Lantern Hall

Yamaga *toro* lanterns are displayed year-round in the shrine's Lantern Hall (Toro-den). These include examples of the golden and silver-colored lanterns that female dancers wear on their heads during the festival as well as lanterns in the shape of scale-model shrines, castles, birdcages, and dolls. They are crafted entirely with *washi* paper (traditional handmade paper) and trace amounts of glue.

Each year, a new set of *toro* is crafted for the festival and offered to the deities of the shrine in the Agari Toro ceremony. The Lantern Hall exhibits the *toro* for one year, until the following festival. The facility also features a display of portraits of the Thirty-Six Immortals of Poetry by renowned court painter Tosa Mitsuoki (1617–1691). The famous poets were selected by nobleman and poet Fujiwara no Kinto (966–1041). To preserve the condition of Tosa's work, the paintings themselves are in storage, and photographs are displayed in their place.

Around the shrine grounds

A number of smaller shrines are located behind the main hall on the Omiya Jinja grounds. These shrines are dedicated to Shinto deities of soil, maritime safety, and learning, among others. There are also dozens of stone monuments that enshrine the deity Sarutahiko Okami, the grandson of the sun goddess Amaterasu.