

Hikawa-Jinja Shrine



Romon (Great Gate)



一武蔵
宮蔵
氷川神社

A shrine, or jinja, is a place that enshrines a sacred spirit, or kami. Shinto is the ancient folk belief of Japan, a way of life that has been passed down from ancient times as the basis of the thought, ethics, and culture of the Japanese. Japan has always been blessed with vibrant nature, and as people lived together with that nature, they felt a spiritual connection to the power of nature that allowed them their livelihoods as farmers, fishermen, and hunters. This spirituality came to be revered as kami. Accordingly, there are as many kami as there are natural phenomena and ways of life.

Hikawa Jinja enshrines the kami Susano'o, his wife Inadahime, and their child Onamuchi. In Japanese mythology, Susano'o is said to have subdued the eight-headed snake Yamata-no-orochi, took Inadahime in marriage, and composed the first waka, a traditional Japanese poem of thirty-one syllables. He is appealed to for warding off evil and natural disasters, for abundant harvests, for luck in marriage, and for good fortune in life.

Susano'o hails from the Izumo region of Shimane prefecture, and yet he has come to be enshrined in this shrine far removed from Izumo. It is said that Etamohi-no-mikoto, a leader of Izumo people, established himself as the kokuzō (similar to a governor) of the land of Musashi, after which Susano'o became warmly revered in this region. The shrine's name Hikawa may have come from the Hiikawa river in the Izumo region, which is mentioned in the Susano'o myths.



Rei - sai (August.1)



Haiden (Worship Hall)



Hanashizume - sai (April.5,6,7)



Oharai (June.30)



Jinko - sai (August.2)

It is said that Hikawa-Jinja Shrine was founded over 2400 years ago. Its branches can be seen through the former land of Musashi (present-day Saitama, Tokyo, and Kanagawa). They consist of over 270 shrines, all originating from this Hikawa Shrine.

During the classical reign of Emperor Shōmu, it attracted fervent devotion as the ichi-no-miya, meaning the most highly ranked and authoritative shrine in its land.

More recently, in the reign of Emperor Meiji it was deemed a chokusaisha, one of only 16 shrines across the country which was permitted to receive an imperial envoy and conduct rituals on imperial orders. Every year on August 1, the current Emperor of Japan continues to allow for the participation of an official envoy at the ceremonies during Hikawa Shrine's central festival.



Daito - sai (December.10)



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Temizu Instructions 21

Shinto reveres purity above all things. The kami detest impurity, and as only the pure are said to be accepted, visitors to a shrine seek the misogi and harae purifications before they pay their respects to the kami. At the basin called temizuya, visitors wash their hands and mouths. It is a place where the body and mind are meant to be purified together, and the hand-washing is a simplified version of misogi and harae. Hand-washing is done in a specific order. First, the ladle is taken in the right hand and used to wash the left hand. Then, the ladle is switched to the left hand to wash the right. The ladle is switched back to the right hand, which is used to rinse out one's mouth. Finally, with an additional scoop of water the left hand is again washed, and the remaining water is used to wash the handle of the ladle. Do not lift the ladle directly to your mouth.



Pond of the Snake 15

The Pond of the Snake (*Jya-no-ike*) is a divine pond within the shrine precincts which is one of the natural springs of the Minuma region. Water floats up from deep within the pond, which has been a river source since ancient times. It is said that the location of Hikawa Shrine was chosen for this reason, making this pond the birthplace of the shrine.



- 1 本殿 Honden(Main Shrine)
- 2 拜殿 Haiden(Worship Hall)
- 3 舞殿 Buden (Hall for dedicating Gagaku and Kagura to Kami)
- 4 楼門 Romon(Great Gate)
- 5 神奥庫 Mikoshiko
- 6 祈祷殿 Kitouden(Prayer Hall)
- 7 神札授与所 Shinsatsu-juyosyo (Amulet Office)
- 8 門客人神社 Monkyakujin-jinja (Auxiliary Shrine)
- 9 御嶽神社 Mitake-jinja (Subordinate Shrine)
- 10 六社 Rokusya (Subordinate Shrine)
- 11 天津神社 Amatsu-jinja (Auxiliary Shrine)
- 12 稲荷神社 Inari-jinja (Subordinate Shrine)
- 13 宗像神社 Munakata-jinja (Auxiliary Shrine)
- 14 松尾神社 Matsu-no-jinja (Subordinate Shrine)
- 15 蛇の池 Pond of the Snake
- 16 神池 Kamiike (Sacred Pond)
- 17 額殿 Gakuden
- 18 神楽殿 Kaguraden (Hall for dedicating kagura to Kami)
- 19 三の鳥居 Sanno-torii (Sacred Gate)
- 20 参道 Sando (Main Approach)
- 21 手水舎 Temizuya

Japan's Longest Shrine Road 20

The sandō, or shrine road, is the way by which visitors approach the shrine, and is a space where the mind and body are purified in order to pray to the kami. The shrine road at Hikawa Shrine extends for about two kilometers, making it the longest straight shrine road in the country. With roughly 650 trees growing along the path, the path becomes verdant green in spring and becomes rich with colors in the fall. It is familiar as a symbol and a place of relaxation for the entire region.



How to Sanpai (pray to Kami)

Hairei, or worship, is a manner of expressing one's gratitude towards the kami and offering prayers. Hairei begins by inserting a monetary offering into the offering box in front of the worship hall. The offering expresses daily gratitude, and can also be used for other purposes, such as having prayers answered or as a ritual gift. The amount of the offering is up to the worshiper. After this, the worshiper takes two deep bows, bending the upper body to ninety degrees, and claps their hands twice. After praying, one bows again. Just as clapping is used in everyday life to express happiness or surprise, or in nature when one is overcome with emotion, during hairei it shows a mind full of deep respect for the kami.

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