

TENMANGU SHRINE

Thank you for visiting Tenmangu Shrine today. Before the tour begins, however, please listen to a short history of the shrine which will explain how it came to be founded here. After the historical explanation, we will walk through the compound.

History

During the reign of Emperor Keiko (71 AD – 130 AD), a Japanese aristocrat dedicated a shrine on a hill in Isobe to Amenohohi no Mikoto, the forefather of the aristocratic Haji clan. This shrine was for the worship of Isobe Myojin, a Shinto god, and is the historical antecedent of what later became Tenmangu Shrine.

After the passage of many centuries, successive generations of the Kiryu Clan, which had taken control of the area from around the year 1187, honored this Shinto deity as their protector.

During the Northern and Southern Court Period (mid to late 14th century), the Kiryu clan had the Shinto god worshipped at Kitano Tenmangu Shrine in Kyoto apportioned, and moved the shrine to its present location, renaming it Kiryu Tenmangu.

From that time this god came to be regarded as the tutelary god protecting the fifty-four villages in the Kiryu area. In the year 1581, Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu, praying for success in his eastern campaign, granted protected status to the shrine as an official Tokugawa Clan shrine. In 1591, the district fell under Tokugawa control. Under their administration, the area in front of the shrine's Torii Gate was designated "Kiryu Shin Machi" or Kiryu New Town. The land south of the torii gate was divided into districts called "cho," a totally new system in Japan. This division of districts, established in the early 17th century, continues to the present day.

In the year 1600, Kiryu weavers produced silk battle flags to be carried into war by Tokugawa soldiers. These battle flags were dedicated at Tenmangu and presented to Lord Tokugawa. After his resounding victory at the famous battle of Sekigahara in Gifu Prefecture, prayers of thanksgiving were offered at the shrine. Kiryu weavers' silk banners became an auspicious sign of the Tokugawa triumph, and as a result, a silk market was established on the grounds of the shrine. This market became the cornerstone of the flourishing silk trade in Kiryu.

Tenmangu Shrine continues to serve as the city shrine. In addition, the shrine compound serves as an Antique and Flea Market Grounds. When the market is open on the first Saturday of every month, there are approximately 80 stalls, making this antique market one of the largest in the Kanto area. Often over 5,000 visitors make their way through the stalls between the hours of 7 am and 4 pm on market days.

Now, let's begin our tour. Please follow the tour route by using the guidemap of Tenmangu Shrine compound. First, before even entering the compound itself, you will

notice a large stone torii gate. This is where we will begin our tour.

1. Main Torii Gate

A torii is a distinctive arch or gateway erected at the entrance to the sacred precincts of a shrine, separating the inner area from the profane world surrounding it. After passing through this Main Torii Gate, there is a pair of “toro” or lanterns along the footpath to the shrine. Please proceed to that point.

2. Toro Lanterns

Lanterns have been used in shrines from ancient times. Although there have been changes in the materials, use, and shape of the lanterns with time, stone is the most commonly used. Now, please walk on to the site numbered 3 on your guidemap.

3. Second Torii Gate

This is a particularly old torii gate, however, it has undergone some restoration work in order to preserve it. To the left of this gate is the residence of the shrine’s chief priest or “guji.” Now, please proceed to number 4 on your guidemap.

4. This is Hatagami Shrine.

As a textile manufacturing center, the citizens of Kiryu honored the god of weaving with this shrine. Next, return to the footpath and proceed to number 5 on your guidemap.

5. The Taiko Bridge (Sacred Bridge)

It is said that a “Taiko-Bashi” or drum bridge, when reflected in the water, resembles a Japanese drum known as a taiko, or a large Japanese barrel drum. This bridge is not for the use of humans, but rather, reserved for sacred spirits. To the right of the Taiko Bridge there is a water wheel, labeled number 6. Please go there now.

6. Water Wheel

This water wheel provides the power for “karakuri ningyo” or mechanical doll performances that take place on the grounds of the shrine on special occasions. During Kiryu’s heyday as a major textile manufacturing city, shrine festivals were often celebrated with elaborate mechanical doll performances.

Now, please proceed to the place labeled number 7 on your guidemap.

7. Zaifuku Inari Shrine

On the west side of the main sanctuary there is a subordinate shrine for sacred spirits, and on the north side of Taiko Bashi another sacred site has been recently dedicated for various ceremonies. Based on ancient designations, this site is called Zaifuku Inari shrine. Originally one of the names of the deity of cereals, Inari has been the deity most widely worshiped by the

Japanese because of its close association with the nation's rice-centered agriculture. Inari has also been regarded as a guardian of commerce and success.

Now, please proceed to number 8, the Kiryu Gate.

8. Kiryu-mon / Shinmon (Kiryu Gate)

When the shrine was first constructed during the Edo Era, a Shinmon, or shrine gate was also planned. For various reasons, the gate was never built until the shrine's recent restoration. The gate was added to commemorate the restoration project. To the right of Kiryu Gate, you will find a water well. Go there next.

9. Water Well

Typically you will find a source of fresh running water at shrines. It is a Shinto custom to wash your hands and rinse your mouth before praying or making an offering at the shrine. Washing your hands before entering a shrine is called "Temizu"; wash your left hand first, then your right, then rinse your mouth, (do not spit back into the water supply or drink). Tip the ladle backwards to wash the ladle handle with the remaining water and place the ladle opening down on the rack where you found it.

10. Sales Office

Just before you reach the main shrine building, you will find a Sales Stand to the left of the footpath. Here, on feast days and other days of celebration at the shrine, you can buy amulets and souvenirs of the shrine.

11. Koma-inu (Guardian Dogs)

At the entrance of the main shrine building there is a pair of stone dogs standing to the right and left of the shrine entrance. These are called "koma-inu" and are placed in or near a shrine as guardians. Imported from the Asian continent, they later assumed decorative significance. These figures are also called shishi-koma-inu.

12. Main Shrine

Tenmangu is a classic example of Early Modern Era (mid 16th to 18th centuries) "gongen" construction, built to enshrine a Shinto deity. The Kirizuma-style gables over the Main Sanctuary and Hall of Offerings are resplendently finished in elaborate detail. The architectural plan, illustrated in full color, was drawn by Ekihiro Kano and entitled, "The Hall of Offerings and the Oratory of Tenmangu," and is dated 1771. Construction of the shrine began in 1778. Work proceeded through 1792, requiring the removal of enshrined deities until September of 1799 when the structure was completed and rededicated. A description of this architectural plan is located to the left of the Oratory. Please proceed to the right around the main shrine building and walk to the back.

If you would like to offer a prayer at the shrine, the following is a description of how to do it “Shinto-style.”

- Approach the shrine; if there is a bell, you may ring the bell prior to prayers; if there is a box for donations, leave a modest one in relation to your means; normally there will be a sequence of bows, (commonly 2) and then claps (commonly 2), hold the second and put your hands together in front of your heart for a closing bow after your prayers.
- Be sincere and respectful to the staff and other visitors, and if at all possible, be quiet. Do be aware that there are places one should not go on the shrine grounds. If the shrine is open, you may look inside, but you should remove your shoes before going up the stairs.

13. Kasuga Subordinate Shrine

Kasuga Shrine is a subordinate shrine located behind Tenmangu. Kasuga is a small shrine constructed in the Shinto “nagare” style. While the structure is small, recent research conducted by the government’s Building Investigations Department has confirmed that the shrine was built sometime before 1600. This being the case, Kasuga Shrine is the oldest existing structure in the Kiryu area.

The shrine was originally located in Hisakata Village Umebara (just north of its current location) and was moved to Akagi no Mori in Arato Shin Machi, where it stands now. This is the founding site of what later became known as Kiryu Shin Machi, with the combined deities on the compound serving as the tutelary deities of the 54 villages in the district.

While the building is small, the wood carving is clearly typical of the work of late Muromachi Era sculptors. Chrysanthemums, Arabesque motifs, and flowing maple leaves are painted on one part of the structure. Traces of the vivid colors used can still be seen, however, most of the work has been lost.

Examples of this style of architecture dating back to a time between 1573 and 1614 are extremely rare. For this reason, Kasuga Subordinate Shrine is a precious part of Kiryu’s cultural heritage and as such, it has been designated by the city as an Important Cultural Property.

Please proceed on to your left and walk back towards the front of the main shrine building.

14. Kagura-den (Stage for Classical Shinto Plays)

This stage was built for the performance of “kagura” or classical plays inspired by Shinto mythology. In ancient times, kagura were performed in the open area in front of a shrine. The development of a stage parallels that of theatrical arts such as Noh and Kabuki.

Now, please proceed back along the footpath to number 15 on your guidemap.

15. Shinto Shichi Fukujin Takarabune Shrine

This subordinate shrine is dedicated to the Seven Deities of Good Fortune and is located on the west side of the Tenmangu Shrine compound. The Seven Deities of Good Fortune are seven gods who are said to bring wealth and long life. Widely worshiped from the 15th to 17th

century, the group usually consists of Ebisu, Daikokuten, Bishamonten, Benzaiten, Fukurokuju, Hotei, and Kichijoten. The building once served as the Tenmangu Shrine office. The shrine is officially entitled the “Shinto Seven Deities Shrine / Takarabune Shrine.” Takarabune refers to the treasure ship in which the seven deities are often pictured together.

Now, please go on to the statue of a reclining cow, labeled number 16 on your guidemap.

16. Gankake Nadeushi

Stroking the statue of this sacred cow is said to bring healing on the sufferer who prays for a cure here. Specifically, pilgrims should stroke the area of the cow where a cure is desired for oneself. The cow is effective not only for physical ailments but also for mental and emotional ailments as well.

This is the end of the tour. Thank you for visiting Tenmangu Shrine. Please come again and bring your friends!

The following explanation is for the Silk Market Painting which is only viewable when the Main Shrine Building is open to the public.

The Silk Market Painting

From the early days of the Edo Era (from 1600 to 1868), a bustling silk market was conducted on the grounds of Tenmangu Shrine. Products from neighboring locales were gathered and distributed there making the shrine a center for communication as well.

During the middle of the Edo Era techniques from Kyoto for weaving high quality silk such as saya (gauze twill) and mon'ori (brocade) were introduced in Kiryu. A market for distributing these materials was soon established and was called the “saya-ichi” or silk market.

The painting of the silk market which can be found in the Oratory of Tenmangu Shrine depicts a market where goods are being actively bought and sold. It was painted as a large “ema” or wooden votive painting in 1894 on the occasion of the Tenmangu Extraordinary Festival Observance which took place in 1895.

This design is truly representative of commerce and industry during Japan's early modern period and details many interesting aspects of distribution economics, characteristic of that time.

Tenmangu's Deities:

If you are interested in the Shinto gods worshipped here at Tenmangu Shrine, please listen to the following description:

Tenmangu is dedicated to the worship of Sugawara no Michizane (845 – 903), Amenohohi no Mikoto, his ancestor, and Haraedo Yohashira no Okami

1. Amenohohi no Mikoto

Amenohohi no Mikoto is a Shinto god who was an ancestor of both the powerful Haji Clan and Sugawara no Michizane. During the reign of Emperor Keiko (71 AD – 130 AD), a shrine to Amenohohi no Mikoto was dedicated and called Isobe Myojin. This shrine to Amenohohi no Mikoto is the historical foundation of what later was to become Tenmangu Shrine.

2. Sugawara no Michizane

Sugawara Michizane was born into the Sugawara family, who for generations served as scholars at the Japanese Imperial Court

From a very early age, Michizane demonstrated natural abilities as a scholar, and when he was only five years old, was already composing poetry called “waka.” By the age of eleven, Michizane had mastered the skill of composing classical Chinese poetry. Those around him were astonished by his intellectual prowess. From early childhood, Michizane had been encouraged to pursue his studies and when he reached eighteen years of age, became a writer. At the age of thirty-three, Michizane was considered one of the foremost writers of his time.

Because of his academic excellence and his honest political views, he won the confidence of Emperor Uda and was promoted to the position of a high-ranking government official. At the age of fifty-five, Michizane was appointed Minister of the Right. At that time he was the only high-ranking official appointed from the ranks of academics. However, as a result of a plot against him by the powerful Fujiwara Clan, he was exiled to Dazaifu (present day Kyushu). Two years later, at the age of fifty-seven, Michizane died.

When, after his death, a number of misfortunes at Court were ascribed to his angry spirit, Michizane was posthumously pardoned and promoted to the highest court rank in order to placate his spirit. Shrines dedicated to him were established in Kitano (Kyoto) and Dazaifu. Deified as Tenman Tenjin, Michizane is venerated as the patron saint of scholarship. He is also regarded as an effective protector against evil and disasters.

Since Michizane made the long journey from Kyoto to Dazaifu without encountering any difficulties along the way, he has also come to be revered as a protecting god of travel and traffic safety.

3. Hara'edo Yohashira no Okami

The Hara'edo Yohashira no Okami, a collective name for Seoritsu-hime no Mikoto, Haya'akitsu-hime no Mikoto, Ibukidonushi no Mikoto and Hayasasurahime no Mikoto – the four pillars of purification or “Yohashira”, is a Shinto god of purification against disaster, sin, and other forms of impurity. This collective Shinto deity provides protection against disaster, disease and misfortune.