

A Town of Shinto Deities and Buddhas



Mt. Hachioji
A peak making up part of Mt. Hiei. Kogane no Oiwa on the summit is said to be the origin of Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine.

The Ancient Religion of Mt. Hiei

The Japanese of ancient times believed that deities resided in everything within our universe. In particular, mountains and forests were worshipped as the earthly realms of ancestral deities. Mt. Hiei is one such holy mountain. The origins of Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine in the town of Sakamoto at the base of the mountain are thought to date back to the worship of Mt. Hiei's many deities.

Shinto Deities and Buddhas met on Mt. Hiei

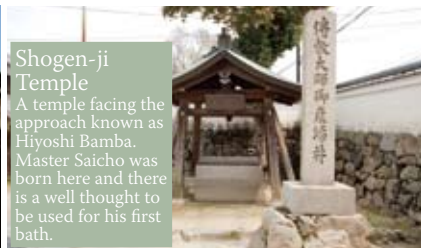
Master Saicho, the founder of the World Cultural Heritage Hieizan Enryaku-ji Temple and a well-known monk, was born and raised in the submontane town of Sakamoto some 1200 years ago. Saicho studied abroad in China as an envoy to the Tang Dynasty. Upon his return to Japan, he set about constructing Enryaku-ji Temple. Learning from China's Tendai sect, the gods of Mt. Hiei were designated as guardian deities. Shinto deities and Buddhas have since been one in the same, playing a major role in every facet of religion and life in Sakamoto. This is the custom of fusing Shinto together with Buddhism.

The Legacy of the Fusion of Shinto and Buddhism

Around 150 years ago the Meiji government issued an edict ordering the separation of Shinto deities from Buddhas, ending the custom of fusing Shinto together with Buddhism which is over-1000-year-old. However, we can still observe the coexistence of Temples and Shrines around Japan, a testament to the once common custom of fusing Shinto and Buddhism. This is also true of Mt. Hiei Sakamoto, with a strong influence still clearly seen in the circumambulation of Enryaku-ji Temple and the festivals and buildings of Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine.



Kogane no Oiwa
This massive rock has shrines located on both sides to celebrate the deities of married couples, namely Ushio-gu Shrine and Sanno-miya Shrine.



Shogen-ji Temple
A temple facing the approach known as Hiyoshi Bamba. Master Saicho was born here and there is a well thought to be used for his first bath.



Jingu-ji Temple Remains
Found at the foot of Mt. Hachioji. Saicho's father built a hermitage here and prayed for safe conception.



Sanno Prayer Service
A joint Shinto-Buddhist event held every year on May 26 at Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine Nishi-hongu. The chief priest's address is followed by a Buddhist memorial service by the monks of Enryaku-ji Temple.



Geden
Tradition states that a geden or space was created in the lower sanctuary of the Honden (Sanno seven shrines) when Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine and Enryaku-ji Temple were more closely connected. Monks would worship Buddhist statues and images and perform Buddhist rituals here.



Sanno Torii
The torii is one of Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine's most recognizable features. It is also called Gassho Torii due to the Buddhist hand gesture of respect "Gassho" placed on top of it, indicating its joint Shinto and Buddhist history.