

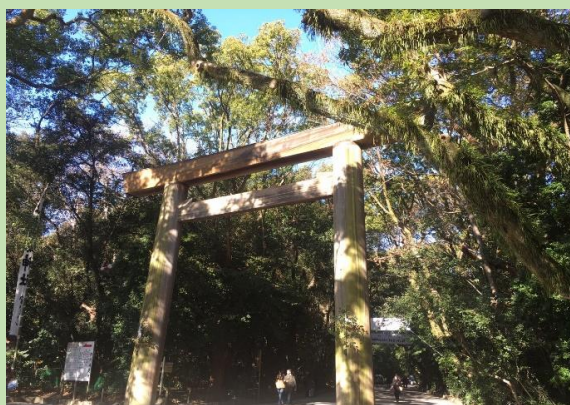
Hidden Secrets of ATSUTA SHRINE

Atsuta Jingu, or Atsuta Shrine, is one of the most famous sightseeing spots in Nagoya. Many international tourists visit it everywhere. However, if you didn't know anything about it when you visited, you would probably think that Atsuta is just a bigger version of the same kind of shrines you can see all over Japan. Even though Atsuta is very famous, its charms are hidden from most international visitors. We want to change that.

We are a group of 3 high school students from Aichi and 3 international university students studying at Aichi Prefectural University. We wrote this article to share the great points of Atsuta Shrine with English speakers. We hope that if you read this, your visit to Atsuta will be charming on many more levels!

Entering a Different World: Getting the “Ghibli Movie” Experience in Atsuta

One of the most interesting things about Japan is the coexistence of traditional and futuristic themes. Especially the religious connection that Japanese have with their surroundings is a big contrast to western societies, where a connection like this is more a thing of the past. So, it is no wonder that the movies of Studio Ghibli are successful not only in Japan, but internationally. The way they often showcase a mix of traditional Japan and various gods in a fantasy-like approach takes western viewers into a world they have never seen before.



When you come to Atsuta Shrine, this is exactly the type of Japan you can find. In contrast to the busy streets of the Sakae district that are just a few minutes away by train, entering Atsuta Shrine takes you into a completely different setting, with big trees and small, interesting religious relics everywhere. Atsuta Shrine is a soothing forest filled with things that look just like they were taken out of a Ghibli movie.

Of course, you can go to the bigger buildings that the path and groups of other visitors naturally lead you to and pray there. But if you look into the smaller side-paths, you can find ancient trees or calm fountains that you can also pray to. These are quieter places than the main spots of the shrine. Atsuta Shrine is the perfect place if you want to explore a more natural type of Japanese tradition than the typical big shrines of Kyoto or other cities offer.

Main Shrine (*Hongu*)



The Main Shrine or *hongu* is located in the very back of the shrine grounds, in the north-center of Atsuta. The main shrine is laid out in a series of “gates” that symbolize different levels of closeness to the god, starting from the innermost *honden* (main palace), and followed by the *torii* (holy shrine gate), *mon* (main gate), *mikaki* (outer wall) and *haiden* (holy building.)

Why is the Main Shrine so famous?

Mainly it is because this is said to be place which enshrines the Kusanagi Sword, one of the three Imperial Regalia. The sword is connected to many legends. Atsuta no Okami, the god which Atsuta Shrine enshrines, is also known as the goddess Amaterasu Omikami. As the story goes, she lives within the sacred Kusanagi Sword. Amaterasu Omikami is the most famous deity in Japan, and so items connected to her are very sacred. In addition, according to ancient records the Kusanagi Sword was used in the founding of the Japanese nation.

The Kusanagi Sword is not open to the public because it is very precious. This is kept very safely inside the shrine.

Food

There are a lot of food wagons along the streets in the shrine. In addition, you can enjoy the local specialty *kishimen*, which are flat *udon* noodles in a savory soup, at the restaurant inside the shrine grounds. This restaurant is not just a tourist trap; local Nagoyans love coming to the restaurant after praying at the shrine.



Kishimen Restaurant Information

Miya-Kishimen (on the shrine premises)

Hours of Operation: 9:00-16:30

Closed on: December 31 (22:00-05:00), January 4(22:00-0330)

Website (Japanese) <https://www.miyakishimen.co.jp/jingu/>

Power Spots

Have you ever heard of a “power spot?” This Japanese-English word means “a place filled with spiritual energy.” The most famous power spot in Atsuta shrine is the Main Shrine. A lot of people come to feel its power every year. However, besides the shrine, there are some “hidden power spots” as well.



1. Shimizu-Sha

To the north of Main Shrine there is a small shrine called Shimizu-sha. It has a spring named “Oshimizu-sama” behind it. There are two legends connected to Shimizu-Sha and its spring. One is a legend about Taira no Kagekiyo, a general of the Heike warrior clan in the 12th Century. When he got an illness of the eyes, Kagekiyo washed his eyes with the water from Oshimizu-sama.

After that, his eyes dramatically recovered. The other legend concerns Yang Guifei, a princess of China. She was very beautiful, known in Asian stories as one of the three most beautiful women of all time. One of the rocks in the Oshimizu-sama spring is said to be her gravestone. Therefore, the water from Oshimizu-sama is said to be good for the eyes and able to make your skin as beautiful as Yang Guifei's.

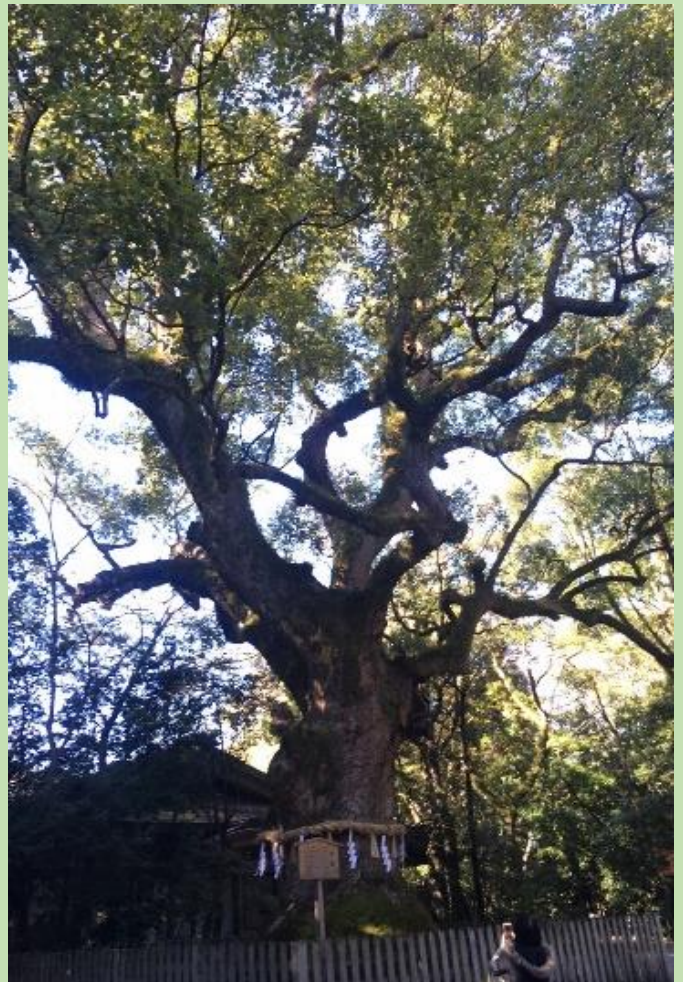
2. Okusu

Okusu is the third-tallest camphor tree in the shrine grounds. It is estimated to be more than 1000 years old. It has a hollow within which lives a snake. It is said that money will come to you if you can see the snake.

3. Ichinomisaki Shrine

Ichinomisaki Shrine is located in the most sacred place of Atsuta Shrine. The “*aramitama*” of Atsuta no Okami, the god of Kusanagi sword, is enshrined there. “*Aramitama*” is a word to describe the rough side of a god's soul. Reversely, the gentle side is called “*nigimitama*.”

If you visit Ichinomisaki Shrine, you may be able to receive the power of the “*aramitama*” and become brave like Atsuta no Okami.



Festival

Atsuta Shrine holds its annual Atsuta Matsuri festival in June. During the festival, thousands of people visit the temple and take part in traditional activities. The roads are lined with street food stalls and games you can take part in. There is a large display of five floats, known as *Kento Makiwara*, with 365 lanterns (one for every day of the year) arranged in a sphere, and 12 lined up from top to bottom, representing the 12 months. This is kept at the three *torii* gate entrances to the shrine. During the festival, there is a traditional ceremony performed by the shrine priests and the Emperor's messenger, and many other events, including martial arts demonstrations and a traditional dance.

How to Get to Atsuta: Public Transport Access

[Access by Meitetsu Railway Network]

From the Meitetsu Nagoya Station to Jingumae Station it is just 2 stations away, and is also nearest to the East Gate. If you are already in Nagoya Station, this is the most convenient line.

[Access by JR Railway Network]

On the JR Tokaido Main Line Nagoya station (CA68) to Atsuta Station (CA65), it is just 3 stations away, nearest to the East Gate. Convenient for those who have a JR Rail Pass which enables you to freely travel along the JR Line.

[Access by Nagoya Subway Network]

To get to Atsuta Jingu from Nagoya Station, take the Higashiyama Line to Sakae Station then switch to the Meijo Line and board the train bound “anti-clockwise” and alight at Jingu-Nishi Station for the West Gate or at Tenma-Cho Station for the South Gate.



Walking From Tenma-Cho Station

- ① Go to Exit 1
- ② Make a U-turn (left photo)
- ③ Turn right (right photo)