

Shinto at a glance



The essence of Shinto is the Japanese devotion to invisible spiritual beings and powers called *kami*, to **shrines**, and to various **rituals**.

Shinto is not a way of explaining **the world**. What matters are rituals that enable human beings to communicate with *kami*.

Kami are not God or gods. They are spirits that are concerned with human beings - they appreciate our interest in them and want us to be happy - and if they are treated properly they will intervene in our lives to bring benefits like health, business success, and good exam results.

Shinto is a very local **religion**, in which devotees are likely to be concerned with their local shrine rather than the religion as a whole. Many Japanese will have a tiny shrine-altar in their homes.

However, it is also an unofficial national religion with **shrines** that draw visitors from across the country. Because **ritual** rather than belief is at the heart of Shinto, Japanese people don't usually think of Shinto specifically as a religion - it's simply an aspect of Japanese life. This has enabled Shinto to **coexist happily with Buddhism** for centuries.

- The name Shinto comes from Chinese characters for *Shen* ('divine being'), and *Tao* ('way') and means 'Way of the Spirits'.
- Shrine visiting and taking part in **festivals** play a great part in binding local communities together.
- Shrine visiting at **New Year** is the most popular shared national event in Japan.
- Because Shinto is focussed on the **land of Japan** it is clearly an ethnic religion. Therefore Shinto is little interested in missionary work, and rarely practised outside its country of origin.
- Shinto sees human beings as basically good and has no concept of original sin, or of humanity as 'fallen'.

- Everything, including the spiritual, is experienced as part of **this world**. Shinto has no place for any transcendental other world.
- Shinto has no canonical **scriptures**.
- Shinto teaches important **ethical principles** but has no commandments.
- Shinto has no founder.
- Shinto has no God.
- Shinto does not require adherents to follow it as their only religion.