

The
Roots of
JAPAN
Takachiho




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Takachiho Town

The Town of Takachiho

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Takachiho



- Tourist guide book -



The Roots of JAPAN Takachiho

The Town of Takachiho

Takachiho is located in northern Miyazaki Prefecture, in a scenic valley of natural landmarks, tea fields, and terraced rice fields. These fields and the network of water canals that support them, many built by the community over the past one hundred years and more, have been recognized as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS). The town has several nationally-recognized natural landmarks, such as the Takachiho Gorge with its steep 100-meter high walls and the picturesque Manai Falls at its center. Many visitors come to enjoy a boat ride during the day or the illuminated falls at night.

Home to several places featured in Japanese mythology, Takachiho's shrines are popular destinations. Many shrines have deep connections to Japanese myth and local legend. Amano Iwato Shrine, for example, houses the location of Amano Iwato, a sacred cave where the sun *kami* deity once hid from the world. Kushifuru Shrine on Kushifuru Peak honors the arrival of a vital mythological figure to earth: Ninigi no Mikoto, the grandson of the sun deity, and the mythological great-grandfather of the first emperor of Japan, Emperor Jimmu. Kushifuru Shrine marks the location where Ninigi is said to have arrived after descending from the heavens. In the Takachiho area, it is believed that Emperor Jimmu was born and raised on Takachiho's Kushifuru Peak with his three older brothers. One of those brothers, Mikeiri no Mikoto, is venerated at Takachiho Shrine, a shrine with a history tracing back over 1,900 years.

Takachiho is where visitors can experience *yokagura*, a nationally-recognized folk cultural asset. *Yokagura* is a theatrical Shinto dance, and at select times in the winter different communities in Takachiho gather for night-long performance ceremonies. Although usually a local tradition, visitors from other communities can also celebrate *yokagura* events. During the festivities, guests can enjoy traditional Takachiho cuisine such as *kappo dori* (a chicken dish cooked in a freshly cut bamboo stem) and *kappo zake* (sake served in a heated bamboo cup).

1 Takachiho Gorge



Manai Falls was chosen as one of Japan's Top 100 Waterfalls for its scenic beauty. The sight of the waters crashing into the gorge is a highlight for visitors.

2 Mythological Tale



There are some places of mythological tale in Takachiho. Each shrine has deep connections to Japanese myth and local legends.

3 Takachiho Yokagura



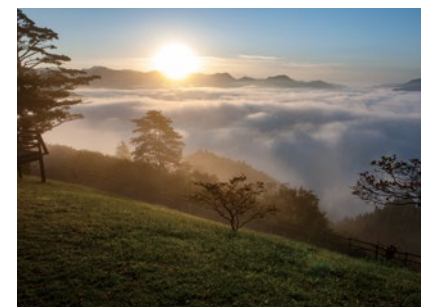
For the people of Takachiho, this is a sacred ceremony that brings human and *kami* deities together for a night of merriment. Takachiho *Yokagura* was designated a significant intangible folk cultural asset of Japan in 1978.

4 Shrines



There are many historical and traditional shrines in Takachiho. They are now considered the spiritual spots that connect heaven and earth. People can honor these *Kami* deities there.

5 The original Scenery



Takachiho's beautiful rice terraces are green in the summer and golden in the autumn. And Kunimigaoka is commonly visited as a place to view a "sea of clouds", a natural phenomenon of cloud cover settling over the Takachiho Basin.

6 Food / Souvenir



Takachiho has a lot of attractive specialties. You can enjoy Takachiho beef, Kamairicha tea, Masks of Kagura and so on..



Manai Waterfall / rental rowboat

1 *Takachiho Gorge* MAP 1

Takachiho Valley is a place of dramatic topography and scenery pervaded by the images of the gods and goddesses of Japan's creation myths and legends. The steep precipices plunging down to the swirling currents of the Gokase River of Takachiho Gorge were formed by pyroclastic flows from double eruptions around 120,000 years ago and 90,000 years ago that also gave birth to the nearby volcano, Mt. Aso and its massive caldera. In 1934 the valley was designated a National Scenic Spot and Natural Monument, and in 1965, it was included in the Sobo-Katamuki Quasi-National Park. Cooling and erosion over time created cliffs of basalt columns with vertical rib-like protrusions that give them the look of scales on a dragon's back. Cliff heights range from 80 to 100 meters and are best viewed from the 1-kilometer gorge promenade as you look down the sheer walls or close-up from a rowboat on the Gokase River. Other features include the Manai Falls, enhanced also by a close-up view from the water, and the three arched bridges that span the valley. One valley legend describes servants fleeing the fall of Mitai Castle in 1591 who, for lack of a bridge to cross the river, threw an enormous spear across to use as a bridge. Another link to regional myth is found in the river's Onokoro Pond, believed to be where Izanami and Izanagi (the divine couple credited with creating the islands of the Japanese archipelago) gave birth to the natural formations and people of Japan. A huge boulder, dubbed the Stone of Kihachi's Might, is said to have been hurled by the fearsome demon Kihachi during a legendary battle he lost to Mikeiri no Mikoto, the brother of Japan's first monarch.



The stone of Kihachi's Might



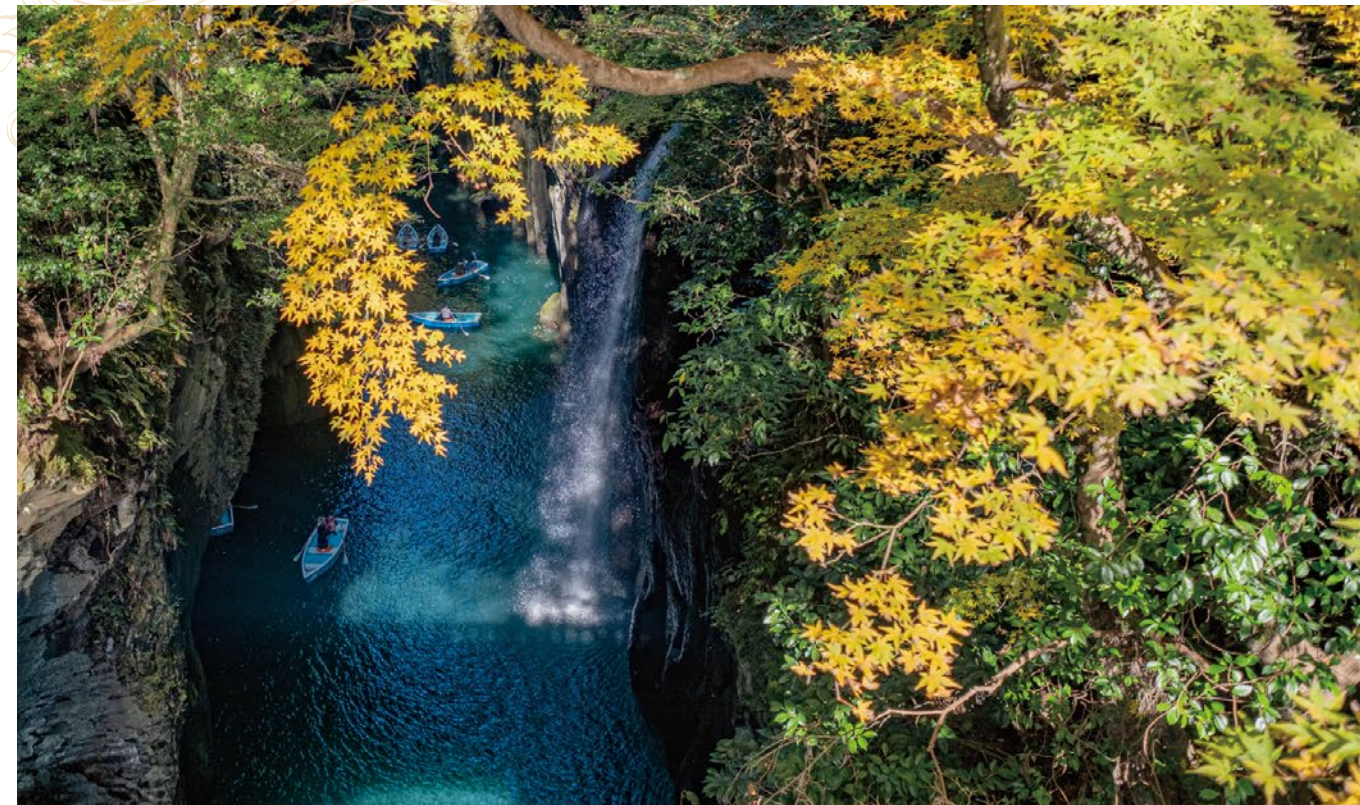
Onokoro Pond



Onokoro Shima

Manai Waterfall and View of the Three Takachiho Bridges

Pouring down from a height of 17 meters in a captivating white veil, Manai Waterfall is a highlight of any visit to the Takachiho Valley. One of Japan's top 100 waterfalls, the wonders of the Manai plume, which feathers out in a cascade to the Gokase River, can be taken in by walking the valley promenade or rowing into the river by rental rowboat. The myth of the origins of Manai Waterfall tells of a spring created as the first source of water on earth by the gods when they found there was no water in the area.



Manai Waterfall in the season of autumn leaves

Another highlight here occurs after sundown from mid-July to mid-September when LED lights in blue, yellow, purple, and pink shine along the walls of the gorge as well as Manai Waterfall as part of the Takachiho Gorge Illumination. The best point to view the falls is along the valley promenade, where 200 traditional-style lanterns are lighted at dusk, enhancing the atmosphere of the walk popular for an evening stroll. Another rare perspective afforded by the gorge is Sanbashi (Three Bridges), claimed to be the only spot in Japan where you can see three arched bridges in one view. Each shows a variation in construction from different eras of Japan: Shinbashi, with stone masonry over a concrete arch; Takachiho Ohashi, made of steel in the Showa era (1926–1989); and Shinto Takachiho Ohashi, a bridge entirely of concrete constructed in the Heisei era (1989–2019).



Takachiho Gorge Illumination



View of the Three Takachiho Bridges

2 Mythological Tale

Creation According to Shinto Mythology

A Shinto interpretation of creation is that the world and its inhabitants are not “made” but “born,” and the divine couple Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto play a central role in this narrative. The couple marry and give birth to the islands of Japan, as well as to several important natural deities that give the islands shape. This myth of Izanagi and Izanami introduces significant concepts, such as male and female roles, marriage, copulation and birth, death and the afterlife, and the birth and death cycle.

Opening Amano Iwato, The Heavenly Stone Cave

(The myth of luring the sun *kami*, Amaterasu Omikami, out of hiding)

In a famous Japanese mythical tale, the sun *kami* deity Amaterasu Omikami hid away in a cave and plunged the world into darkness. To lure her back out, myriads of *kami* deities enacted an elaborate ruse: they staged a festival with song and dance outside the cave's entrance. Amaterasu, perplexed by the revelry outside, cracked open the stone door of the cave to peek out, and the deities used the opportunity to pry open the door and fling it away. Thus, a festival helped restore light to the world.



Amano Yasukawara



Amano Iwato Shrine



The descent on the earth of Ninigi no Mikoto

“Tenson Korin”

(The story of the sun *kami*'s grandchild, Ninigi no Mikoto, and his descent to earth)

According to the *Kojiki*, Japan's oldest remaining chronicle, the sun *kami* deity Amaterasu Omikami sent her grandson, Ninigi no Mikoto, to rule the lands of Japan. He took with him three gifts, a jewel, a mirror, and a sword (which would later become the imperial regalia of Japan). It is written that Ninigi and his procession made their way through the heavens and descended at “Kushifurutake of Takachiho.” Upon arrival, Ninigi declared the land good, and so established there a grand residence. Kushifuru no Mine, the mountain believed to be the site of this descent, is where Takachiho's Kushifuru Shrine now stands. In Japanese mythology, the first emperor of Japan is Ninigi's great-grandson.

The dance based on the mythology



The Goshintai Dance
The Dance of the birth to the islands of Japan



The Totori Dance

Amaterasu is enshrined at Takachiho's Amano Iwato Shrine. It is here that Amano Iwato (the cave in which Amaterasu hid) and Amano Yasukawara (the area where the *kami* gathered to discuss their strategy to lure her out) are said to be located.



3 Takachiho Yokagura ^{MAP}

Yokagura, a ritual dance tradition passed down at Takachiho Shrine and the district of Takachiho, is linked to Japanese mythology. In one of the myths, the sun goddess Amaterasu retreats into a cave after a quarrel with her mischievous brother, the storm god Susano O, and blocks herself in with a boulder, plunging the world into darkness. Other deities gather and endeavor to lure her out, but to no avail. Finally, Ame no Uzume, known as the Divine Goddess of Revelry, performs a humorous and bawdy dance. Soon peals of laughter can be heard among those gathered outside the cave. Amaterasu grows curious to learn what is causing the commotion and moves aside the boulder. As she does so, light spills out, filling the world once more with light.

The Takachiho district is widely believed to be the place where such myths originated, and its traditions of *kagura* (literally, “god entertainment”) dance may trace back to such beginnings. *Kagura* is today considered Japan's oldest performing art, and Takachiho's *yokagura* (“night kagura”) is an important branch of that tradition. *Yokagura* is performed, suitably enough, from sundown to sunrise, between mid-November and early February. The performances are part of the harvest festivals of numerous villages around. Each village has its own renditions of dances depicting 33 episodes of the myth, presented in honor of the deities worshipped in the Takachiho district.

Takachiho Shrine also presents nighttime performances throughout the year of four key episodes of the myths at its Kagura Hall (Kaguraden). Equally engaging are the dramatic masks worn by performers, which are all handcrafted by local artisans and can be found not just at *yokagura* venues, but displayed in various places throughout the district.





Attendants in the Sacred Garden

Attendants of the shrine busy themselves preparing the *yokagura* venue so that it is fit to welcome the local tutelary deities to a performance. This starts with the building of a visible landmark where the deities are invited to settle (*yorishiro*). Three tall bamboo stalks are erected and decorated outside the venue, or “kagura hall” (*kagurayado*). The attendants also set the sacred stage, which is known as the “gods' garden” (*koniwa*). Only men are permitted to take on this servant role and the same rule applies to the dance performers, who are called *hosyadon*.

Each year some 20 venues, mostly homes throughout the district, will be selected to serve as the sacred stages for the performances, which are unique to each village and scheduled on different nights from mid-November to February. As these

events are held to petition the gods for a bountiful harvest for the current year and fertile conditions for the next. To prepare for the arrival of the water god (*mizukami*) from the mountains, a dance must be performed to purify the space. During this ritual, the powerful god Tajikarao, who broke the rock door to allow the Sun Goddess to leave her cave, appears in a colorful costume, often with a bright red face or blonde hair. Then comes a night of dance by the pantheon of gods and goddesses of Japanese mythology. Between November and February, a total of 33 mythological episodes are performed at each of the venues, each accompanied by the lively strains of a *hayashi* ensemble made up of flutes and drums, and other traditional instruments.

Masks and Sculptures

Masks play an important role in ritual and dramatic traditions around the world. Traditional Japanese performing arts such as *kagura* are no different, using masks to great effect. In Takachiho *yokagura* masks are known as *omote-sama*—the character for “omote” can mean either “mask” or “face.” Ranging in appearance from comic and tragic to dramatic or terrifying, specific masks have captivated audiences for centuries and have become clearly associated with specific deities. Mask makers, many of whom are members of family-run workshops, are highly accomplished in depicting each deity's signature characteristics. Some workshops have been active for generations, carving masks out of camphor laurel and paulownia wood. Every step of the creation process is handled by one workshop, from felling the tree to carving and applying the final painting of the mask's surface. It takes two days to carve the wood into the expressive features required and five more for the painting and glazing for a total production time of at least one week per mask. Mask makers here are also considered sculptors, as their masks are also used for display on four sides of the sacred stage referred to as the gods' garden (*koniwa*) as well as in Takachiho Shrine's Kagura Hall and outside the homes where performances are held, with designs signifying such elements such as wood, fire, earth, and water. The finely crafted masks are also sometimes used as celebratory gifts, hung up for protection against evil spirits, and displayed as ornamental decor in public and private spaces.



Erimono(Kagura Paper Decorations)



Takachiho Yokagura masks

The Stories Behind the 33 Dances

Takachiho *yokagura* is a regional version of ritual shrine dances called *kagura* that can be traced back to the myth about Amaterasu Omikami, the goddess of the sun and a dance performed by the goddess Ame no Uzume. This myth is relayed in Japan's oldest extant chronicles, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, both dating back to the early eighth century, while *kagura* itself dates back to the Heian period (794–1185). Takachiho *yokagura* was designated an Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property in 1978 and its legacy is carried on by



The Totori Dance

local villages in the area that host overnight performances in selected homes from mid-November to early February. The dances depict 33 episodes of the ancient myths centering around how Amaterasu Omikami, angered by her mischievous brother's pranks, blocked herself inside the Ama no Iwato cave with a boulder, plunging the world into darkness. When the other gods gathered to decide what to do, Ame no Uzume began to perform a humorous dance, much to the amusement of the gathered deities, causing the Sun Goddess to peek out at the revelry. The powerful god Tajikarao breaks the rock door to allow Amaterasu to leave her cave, and as she emerges, light is restored to the world once more.



The Dance of Tajikarao



The Uzume Dance



The Goshintai Dance

At Takachiho Shrine's Kagura Hall (Kaguraden), four of the 33 episodes are danced year-round: The Dance of Tajikarao, who is depicted seeking Amaterasu's hiding place; Ame no Uzume's hilarious dance to entice Amaterasu out of the cave; the Totori Dance, when the red-faced Tajikarao shatters the rock blocking the cave; and the Goshintai Dance, performed by a couple representing the husband and wife deities Izanami and Izanagi, who legend says gave birth to the islands of Japan, as they prepare rice as an offering to ensure a good harvest, a happy marriage, and healthy children. The couple performs the dance while drinking rice wine, and their inebriated tumbling and stumbling among audience members is thought to transmit divine protection to the participants.

Kagura Hall

The key episodes of Japanese mythology have been preserved in and around the town of Takachiho in part thanks to the *yokagura* dance tradition. Formal performances of the dances take place annually at 20 select venues throughout the town and are largely held for the residents of those communities. However, in recent years, Takachiho *yokagura* has started to attract visitors, both from other parts of Japan and from overseas. To provide a venue that shares this sacred heritage with visitors from outside the area, the Kagura Hall (Kaguraden) within the grounds of Takachiho Shrine puts on four of the 33 episodes. The spacious hall just a few steps from the main sanctuary of the shrine has a broad stage festooned with masks of the kind used in the dances. Dancers, mostly male performers known as *honadon* who are accompanied by a *hayashi* ensemble playing traditional flutes and drums, enact the dances of the gods Tajikarao, Uzume, Totori, and Goshintai throughout the year.





4 Shrines

Takachiho Shrine MAP 4

Although details of its founding remain unknown, Takachiho Shrine is referred to in Japan's “six national histories” (*rikkokushi*) from the Heian period (794–1185) as the highest-ranked Shinto shrine in Hyuga Province, the ancient name for present-day Miyazaki, the prefecture where Takachiho is located. Today it serves as the parent shrine of 88 other shrines in 18 villages in the area. The shrine's main sanctuary and its pair of *komainu* guardian figures have been designated National Important Cultural Properties, while various sites in and around the shrine, both natural and architectural, are believed to be directly related to Japan's creation myth and the tales of its gods and goddesses. Twenty-three deities are worshipped within and around the grounds, 16 of them in the main sanctuary (*honden*) and seven at nearby Aratate Shrine. These divinities are worshipped as guardians of agriculture, thought to assure bountiful harvests and protection against evil spirits. It is said that Takachiho Shrine has also served as a protector of the *yokagura* dance tradition for more than 800 years. Kagura Hall, the venue for regular performances of the dances, is located within the shrine grounds. The shrine's simple architecture is in harmony with the towering trees found throughout the shrine grounds. Among these sacred trees are two, the 800-year old Chichibu Cedar and the Meoto Sugi (Husband and Wife Cedars) pair.

Main Sanctuary

Early chronicles suggest the Takachiho Shrine was founded during the reign of the legendary Emperor Suinin (est. BCE 29–CE 70), though the present buildings, including the main sanctuary, date back to 1778, when Naito Masanobu (1752–1805), third daimyo of the ruling Nobeoka clan, had them rebuilt. Recognized as an Important Cultural Property in 2004, the main sanctuary (*honden*) is a five-bay wide structure (*gokensha*) roofed in the *nagare-zukuri* (flowing) style, which features a sloping roof extending further over the front than at the back. Shrines in the *nagare-zukuri* style are not uncommon in this region, making it a distinctive feature of the landscape, but few are as large as the Takachiho Main Hall. Three bays are fitted with folding doors and the two outer bays with latticed panels. Other notable features of the shrine include the various decorative elements, including intricate sculptures and carvings.



The shrine grounds colored by autumn ginkgos



Worship Hall(left) Main Sanctuary(rear right)

Shrine Heritage

Among the deities enshrined in the main sanctuary are seven that are collectively known as the Takachiho Sumegami. These are actually three couples and include the deity Ninigi no Mikoto, grandson of sun goddess Amaterasu (from whom it is believed all Japanese emperors are descended), and his wife Konohana sakuya-hime as well as their son Ho-ori. As related in the early chronicles, Ho-ori was the grandson of Japan's first monarch, Emperor Jimmu, who is said to have reigned between BCE 660 and BCE 585. Also enshrined here are 10 deities known as the Jissha Daimyojin who are Emperor Jinmu's older brother, Mikeiri no Mikoto, and his wives and children. Among the sculptures inside the hall is one of Mikeiri, shown wielding a sword over the head of a demon. This is a depiction of a local legend about Mikeiri's battles with a fearsome demon named Kihachi, who had descended from his mountain cave below the mythical Futagami Shrine and terrorized local residents, kidnapping Princess Unome along the way. After two attempts Mikeiri eventually defeats the demon, cutting him up into three pieces, and rescues the princess, who becomes his wife. In addition to the statue, the influence of this legend can be found throughout the Takachiho area, including the annual Boar Offering Festival at Takachiho Shrine, which is held to appease Kihachi's spirit and ensure he never troubles residents again. Mikeiri is therefore seen as a divine protector against misfortune and the guardian of farming and other industries against evil deities that descend from the mountains and roam the region.



Architectural Highlights

The Main Hall is noted for architectural and decorative features more commonly found in Buddhist architecture than shrines: the phoenix carvings below the front-bay gable, curved rainbow beams connecting the roof's supporting pillars, and “frog's-leg” struts supporting the crossbeams. The facade shows signs of having been colorfully painted, but the colors have long since faded, leaving the structure in perfect harmony with its wooded surroundings.

Meoto-sugi

To the left of the entrance to the Main Shrine is a pair of immense Japanese cedars (*sugi*; *Cryptomeria japonica*), known as Meoto-sugi (Husband and Wife Cedars) as they have grown from common roots. The pair of trees symbolize the dedicated husband-and-wife pair, and visitors who circle the tree three times while holding hands with someone they love are believed to be blessed with peaceful relations, a happy and prosperous home, and a family with many children.

Takachiho Shrine is surrounded by a grove of tall and straight cedars that heighten the sense of a place endowed with the presence of the divine. They are adorned with *shimenawa*, which are ropes indicating an object or demarcated space imbued with the spirit of the divine. Often the ropes are adorned with stalks of straw or zig-zag shaped streamers (called *shide*). Cedar trees often grace the approach to shrines, providing seclusion and a natural corridor between the secular and sacred realms as well as shade from the sun.



Chichibu Cedar

The 800-year-old tree standing to the left of the main hall's sanctuary is called the Chichibu Cedar. The towering 55-meter tree is 9 meters in circumference. According to legend, it was planted by the twelfth-century samurai Hatakeyama Shigetada (1164–1205), a renowned figure who appears in the fourteenth-century epic, *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*), and often portrayed in paintings and public statues. Hatakeyama planted the tree upon being sent to the shrine by Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), first shogun of the Kamakura shogunate, to pray for peace and tranquility in the country. An interesting historical footnote is that Hatakeyama had, in fact, planted two cedars, but the second one fell over during a typhoon in 1992 and its wood was milled to build the shrine's Kagura Hall. The surviving tree's name is said to come from Hatakeyama's home of Chichibu, in present-day Saitama Prefecture, a town also known for many sacred *sugi* preserved from antiquity.

The precincts of Takachiho Shrine is thick with cedar trees (*sugi*) that have been standing for centuries. Their presence adds to the sense of the presence of the divine and the harmony with nature felt throughout the grounds. Often the trees are encircled with *shimenawa*, lengths of rice-straw or hemp rope used to signal a ritually purified or sacred space and ward off evil spirits. When placed around trees like the cedars at Takachiho Shrine, they also indicate the presence of spirits known as *kodama* and cutting them down is therefore forbidden.



Iron Guardian Statues and Sacred Stone

Komainu are guardian statues found in pairs at the gates of Shinto shrines and some Buddhist temples. Originally carved from wood and sheltered, the guardian statues were first placed outdoors in the fourteenth century, when they began to be made of stone. The *komainu* at Takachiho Shrine are distinctive in being made of iron. Their rarity, quality, and cultural value are such that they were given the Important Cultural Property designation in 1971. The statues were dedicated to Takachiho Shrine by first Kamakura shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199). It was here that Yoritomo sent his retainer Hatakeyama Shigetada to pray for future of his rule, and here that the Chichibu Cedar was planted to commemorate that visit.



Iron Guardian Statues



The Shizume-ishi (“quelling stone”)

Another sacred artifact of the shrine is a foundation stone, enshrined to the side of the main sanctuary and known as the *shizume-ishi* (“quelling stone”). Enclosed within a plain wood lattice structure, the stone is said to possess divine power. Praying to this stone is believed to relieve suffering and quell disorder in the world.



West Sanctuary

Ama no Iwato Shrine MAP 5

The shrine of Ama no Iwato (Cave of Heaven) is dedicated to Amaterasu Omikami, the primary divinity in the pantheon of indigenous religious belief. Though commonly known as the Sun Goddess, her full name describes her influence as the Great Divinity Illuminating Heaven. She was assigned to rule the High Celestial Plain of Heaven and is the primary female deity in the pantheon and ultimate progenitor of the line of emperors ruling Japan. It is not surprising, therefore, that the shrine dedicated to her is nestled in a secluded natural setting on the edge of a gorge filled with ancient trees and a fast-flowing river. Behind a green curtain of trees on the far side of the gorge opposite the shrine is the Ama no Iwato cave, where Amaterasu, in the myth that gave birth to the *kagura* dance tradition, hid until she was lured out by the lively dance of the deity Ame no Uzume. Though that cave is hidden from sight, you can observe this mysterious, sacred area from the Ama no Iwato shrine observation deck across the gorge. This site and that of Ama no Yasukawara, the cave where the gods met to decide how to entice Amaterasu out of the Ama no Iwato cave, are under the protection of the shrine.

West and East Sanctuaries

This shrine honoring the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami is made up of two sanctuaries, West (Nishi Hongu) and East (Higashi Hongu). The exact details of the shrine's founding are unknown, though it is thought both sanctuaries were originally from different shrines. The West Sanctuary is dedicated to the goddess in her aspect as a child known as Ohirume no Mikoto. This wing is near the Ama no Iwato cave where Ohirume went after falling out with her mischievous brother, Susano O, and leaving the world in darkness, finally to be lured back out by an amusing dance performed by Ame no Uzume. The cave where she hid is known as Ama no Iwato, and West Sanctuary venerates her today through the cave, hidden behind trees. The cave is so sacred that it may not be approached directly, but may be viewed from the shrine observatory located across the gorge. A trail from Nishi Hongu leads to the riverside cave of Ama no Yasukawara, where the *kami* deities are believed to have met to consult about how to bring Amaterasu and her light back into the world. The East Sanctuary, which was incorporated into Ama no Iwato Shrine in 1970, sanctifies the first place that Amaterasu Omikami was thought to reside after emerging from her cave.



East Sanctuary

Riverbed of Ama no Yasukawara ^{MAP} 6

The steep trail following a branch of the Gokase River gushing through Takachiho Gorge descends gradually into a cool realm between rock walls and noted for its place in legends surrounding sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami. The trail leads to the riverside cave of Ama no Yasukawara, where the heavenly gods convened to consult about how to lure Amaterasu, who had darkened the world by retreating into another cave, to come out again and bring light back to the world.

Along the trail are stone cairns left by pilgrims and visitors. As the stones are often set up as forms of prayer, they must not be disturbed.

Another Shinto myth says this is the place where Ninigi no Mikoto came when his grandmother, Amaterasu, sent him to earth. This direct descendant of the sun goddess is considered responsible for Japan's rice-planting agriculture as well as the progenitor of its unbroken line of emperors.



Aratate Shrine ^{MAP} 7



Aratate Shrine venerates Ame no Uzume and Sarutahiko no Mikoto, deities who according to legend were married and lived on these shrine grounds. These deities represent the model of matrimonial bliss and fulfillment that draws worshippers even today. The shrine's name comes from the story that they used rough wood (*ara-ki*) to hastily construct (*tate*) the shrine.

Ame no Uzume, the “Goddess of Divine Revelry,” performed the hilarious dance that brought the Sun Goddess out of her cave, bringing light back to the world. Among Sarutahiko's powers are guidance in travel, and in the early chronicles he is credited with

guiding Ninigi no Mikoto when he descended from the heavens to found Japan's ruling family. Those who seek guidance in their careers, their family's well-being, or their search for a partner come to the shrine to consult in private with its priests.

Two paintings in the Prayer Hall

Of special note are two paintings in the Prayer Hall, which also reflect the additional role of the shrine's deities as protectors of entertainers and entertainment. One shows Ame no Uzume during her legendary dance, which is said to be the origin of ritual shrine dances (*kagura*) performed throughout Japan and a highlight of Takachiho. The second portrays that powerful first meeting of Ame no Uzume and Sarutahiko, so struck with each other they couldn't wait to build their home. Many visitors—including those from Japan's entertainment world—also make a point of striking the wooden boards that hang throughout the shrine grounds and along paths of its grove. These boards are known as the “lucky seven virtue blocks” (*shichifuku tokuju bangi*), and striking them seven times with the accompanying mallets, is said to bring good fortune and fulfillment of prayers.



lucky seven virtue blocks



The powerful first meeting of deities



Ame no Uzume's legendary dance

Kushifuru Shrine ^{MAP} 2



The sculptures of a phoenix and a dragon

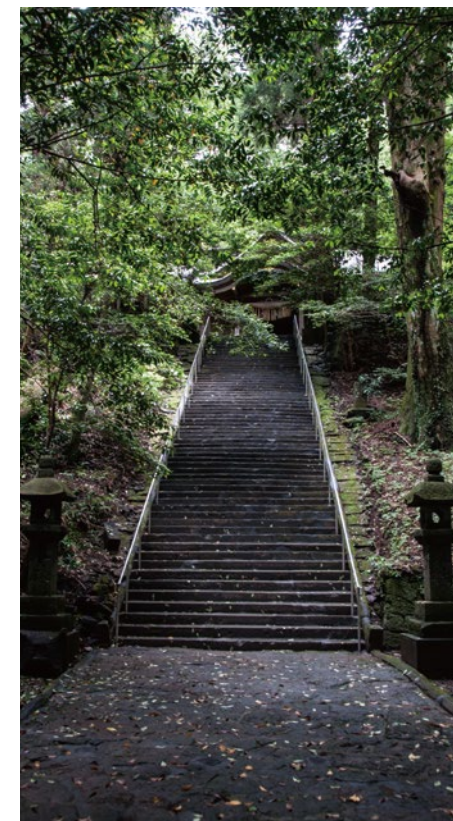
Kushifuru Shrine is built on the site where it is said Ninigi no Mikoto, grandson of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Omikami, arrived with other gods (*kami*) when his grandmother sent him to rule the earth and establish the ruling line. Ninigi came bearing three gifts she had given him: a mirror, a jewel, and a sword. These three subsequently became the imperial regalia. Ninigi and his attendants descended through the clouds, which he dispersed by scattering rice stalks across the land, symbolically giving birth to rice culture starting from this place, and reached the mountaintop of Kushifuru no Mine, where the shrine now stands. He declared the land to be of fertile and built a grand palace of immense height and towering columns.

It was not until 1694 that a shrine dedicated to these deities was built on the mountain where they are believed to have arrived in ancient antiquity. Even before this, it is believed the mountain was revered as the abode of the divine and therefore long regarded as sacred. It was, in fact, thought to be too sacred even to build a physical shrine. The efforts to construct the shrine by people of 18 Takachiho villages was supported by Miura Akihiro, a high-ranking government official of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867). It was known under a variety of names until 1871, when it was officially called Futagami Shrine, which is also the name of a mythical mountaintop shrine under which the fearful deity Kihachi resided in a cave. The name was changed to Kushifuru Shrine in 1910.

Naturally, the principle deity of worship at the shrine is Ninigi himself, whose successful founding of the imperial line is seen in the first emperor of Japan, Jimmu, the god's great-grandson.

The origin of the sport of sumo

Other *kami* venerated at the shrine include Takemikazuchi, whose way of proving his strength is said to have been the origin of the sport of sumo. Noteworthy decorative features of the shrine's main sanctuary include the intricate wood carvings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including phoenix and dragon motifs drawn from Chinese mythology.



The stairs of the approach



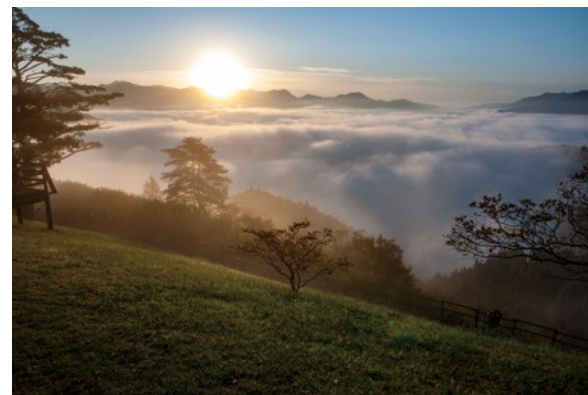
The sumo ring



5 The original Scenery

Kunimigaoka MAP 8

Kunimigaoka affords vast panoramas in every direction from a height of 513 meters, with views of various mountain and valley landmarks of the area. To the east is the Takachiho Basin, the setting of several Shinto myths, while to the west, rises the peaks of Japan's largest active volcano, Mt. Aso, and its huge, ancient caldera. But what holds particular interest here is the view of Takachiho's famous rice terraces. Between September and October, the terraces, together with Takachiho Basin, can be seen blanketed by the naturally occurring “sea of clouds” phenomenon.



The sea of clouds

A statue of Ninigi no Mikoto

In the legends associated with Kunimigaoka, Ninigi no Mikoto, the grandson of sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami, figures prominently. He was sent to this place, it is said, to plant rice and establish the line of rulers of the land as a direct connection to his grandmother. When Ninigi and his entourage encountered dense clouds on the way down, it is said that he cast “precious” (*taka*) and “numerous” (*chi*) “rice stalks” (*ina-ho*), breaking through the clouds to alight on the earth, and this became the mythical source of the town's name, Takachiho. A statue has been erected atop Kunimigaoka hill to commemorate this legend.



The statue of Ninigi and his entourage

Takachiho Amaterasu Railway MAP 11

To accommodate growing interest in the district and its traditions, such as its *kagura* shrine dances, the Takachiho Amaterasu Railway began offering special train tours of local sights in 2017. The single, 30-passenger capacity diesel-driven Super Grand Cart train takes visitors on a 30-minute, 2.5-kilometer ride through tunnels and into landscapes that include Ama no Iwato Shrine, Aratate Shrine, and the Takachiho rice terraces (recognized as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System by the United Nations in 2015). The highest point of the journey is atop the 353-meter-wide Takachiho Iron Bridge. At 105 meters high, this span was for a time Japan's highest-elevation railway bridge. The train's glass floor allows heart-stopping views of the gorge below. The train departs every 40 minutes, offering 10 trips daily (except Thursdays). But journeys may be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions.



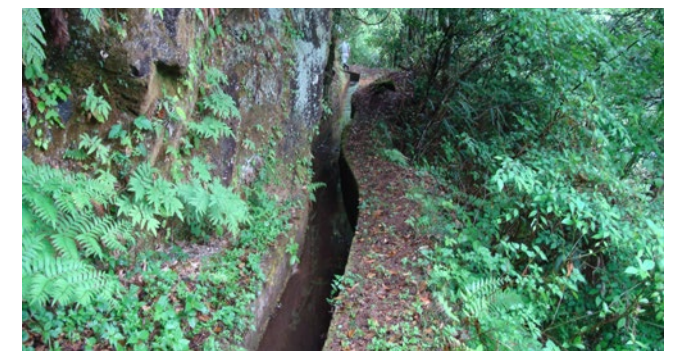
Takachiho Iron Bridge

Rice Terraces and the Mountainside Irrigation Network MAP 9

According to legend, Takachiho's rice fields began when the grandson of Amaterasu Omikami, Ninigi no Mikoto, scattered precious rice stalks across the land. A statue of the famous progenitor with two local men who helped him stands atop the scenic outlook at Kunimigaoka. Today, the vista embraces rice terraces that cover more than 1,800 hectares and are irrigated by a manmade network of ditches. In 2015, the rice paddies and the mountainous Takachihogo-Shiibayama agriculture and forestry region supporting them were recognized by the United Nations as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS). But for centuries, the lack of an adequate water supply meant the main crops here were millet and other grains rather than rice. In the Meiji era (1868–1912), resourceful residents sought to remedy the water supply problem by building by hand an intricate network of ditches to transport water from the mountains. Today, these waterways, some of them over 100 years old, comprise a network more than 500 kilometers long, all maintained by the local community. The ditches act not just as irrigation sources, but also help to drain away rainwater and prevent flooding.



The beautiful rice terraces

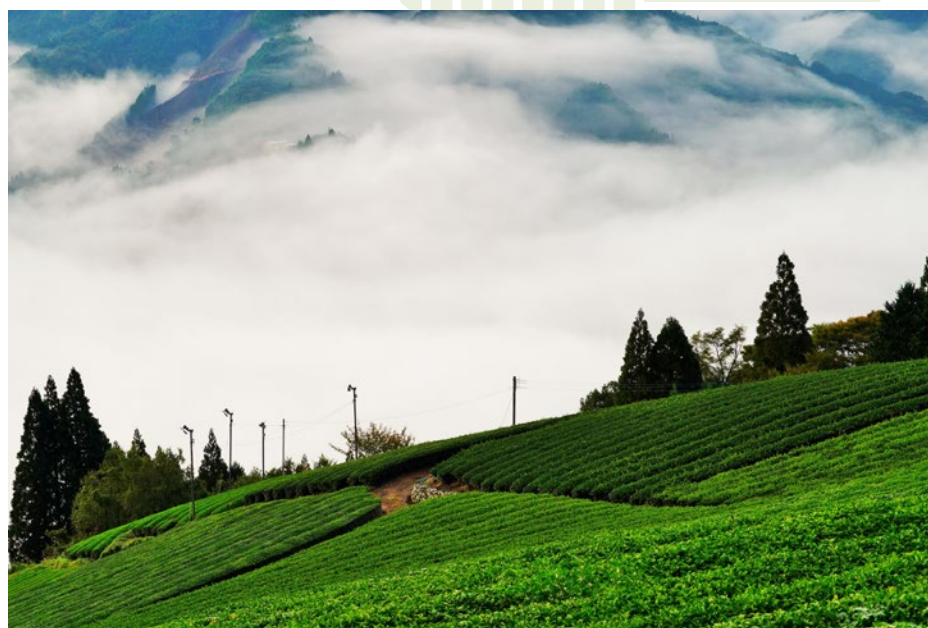


The traditional irrigation

6 Food / Souvenir

Kamairi Tea

The Nishiusuki District that surrounds Takachiho is known for its *kamairi-cha*, a green tea made using a pan-firing process that draws out the depth of flavor of the leaves. While most green tea is prepared by steaming, *kamairi* tea undergoes a pan-firing process that gently heats, rotates, and massages the leaves, resulting in the characteristic rolled-up form of the leaves. Because the tea leaves are tightly packed in the pan-firing process, the tea does not oxidize, distinguishing it from other teas where the oxidation process is allowed to progress, such as oolong and other Chinese teas. Its color is lighter than similar teas while having a rich aroma. Production volume of the tea accounts for just 1 percent of all the other green teas grown on plantations throughout Japan. For years this small volume has meant that while kamairi tea is the staple beverage in the surrounding area, it is something special elsewhere. At present there are some 33 family-owned and operated plantations that continue to flourish by maintaining and preserve this precious legacy of tea.



Kappo Zake (Sake) and Kappo Tori (Chicken)

Kappo cha tea and *kappo zake* are two beverages that are Takachiho specialties. They are brewed and served in a fresh, green bamboo tube, which is reminiscent of Takachiho's rural past when field workers used bamboo tubes to make tea from spring water and mountain-grown leaves. The term “kappo” is thought to come from the word for these tubes in the local Takachiho dialect. It may also be a vocal imitation of the sound the bamboo makes as water is poured from it. Moisture from fresh bamboo lends a natural sweetness to both tea and sake. Enjoy kappo zake, kappo tori, and other local Takachiho delicacies at the Nakayama Castle Ruins Campground or Kagura no Kan Lodge. You can make your reservation on the Takachiho Tourism Center website.



Kappo Tori



Kappo Zake

Takachiho Beef

Among the highlights of Japanese cuisine prized overseas is wagyu beef. Takachiho is known in particular for its beef, with local producers winning the Prime Minister's Award in 2007 at the Ninth National Japanese Beef Ability Expo, also known as the “Wagyu Olympics.” Two hundred of the 500,000 cows raised in the area are groomed as Takachiho beef each year, feeding on pasture grass and drinking spring water from the 1,756-meter Mt. Sobo nearby. Such limited numbers mean the beef is not often shipped outside of the immediate area, but the excellent quality of the beef draws diners eager to taste the high-quality marbled beef produced here. The heritage of careful cattle raising in Takachiho is not only the result of on-going efforts to improve stock since the Meiji era (1868–1912) but also by careful nurturing of the breed since early in the twentieth century.



The restaurant “Nagomi”

Kappo Tori

Kappo tori is a chicken dish that, like *kappo cha* tea, is cooked over a flame inside a bamboo tube. The care taken in its preparation is now considered an expression of hospitality in the Takachiho area, and so it is often served at special occasions such as local festivals. *Kappo tori* ingredients may differ by season or preference, but typically include chicken, *shiitake* mushrooms, burdock, and leeks. Seasoned with salt, pepper, and garlic, *kappo tori* takes about 30 minutes to cook. When the moisture from the bamboo begins to bubble up, it is ready to be served.



TAKACHIHO

TOURIST SPOT MAP

- ① Takachiho Gorge
- ② Kushifuru Shrine
- ③ Takachiho Yokagura
- ④ Takachiho Shrine
- ⑤ Ama no Iwato Shrine
- ⑥ Ama no Yasukawara
- ⑦ Aratate Shrine
- ⑧ Kunimigaoka
- ⑨ Terraced Rice Fields
- ⑩ Takachiho Gamadase Market
- ⑪ Takachiho Amaterasu Railway
- ⑫ Tourism Association Information Center
- ⑬ Michino-Eki Takachiho Souvenir Store

Souvenir Store



⑩ Takachiho Gamadase Market

You'll enjoy the local food,handicrafts,and so on..There are something daily fresh vegetables,processed products.



⑬ Michino-Eki Takachiho Souvenir Store

You can get some information for your fulfilling tour.



Tourism Association Souvenir Shop



Access to Takachiho



From Airports

By Car

Fukuoka Airport	Fukuoka Airport: Approx. 3 hours 30 mins	TAKACHIHO
Miyazaki Airport	Miyazaki Airport: Approx. 2 hours 15 mins	TAKACHIHO
Aso Kumamoto Airport	Kumamoto Airport: Approx. 1 hour 30 mins	TAKACHIHO

By highway bus

Fukuoka Airport	Highway Express Bus Gokase-gou	TAKACHIHO
	Approx. 3 hours and 30 min. 4 buses a day Reservation Required	
Aso Kumamoto Airport	Express Bus Aso-gou, Takachiho-gou	TAKACHIHO
	Approx. 2 hour 2 buses a day	

By Train and Bus

Hakata Station	Kyushu Shinkansen (Bullet Train)	Express Bus Aso-gou, Takachiho-gou	TAKACHIHO
	Approx. 30 min.	Approx. 3 hours 2 buses a day Reservation Required	
Miyazaki Station	JR Express Train	Route Bus	TAKACHIHO
	Approx. 1 hour	1 hour and 30 min.	
Kumamoto Station	Express Bus Aso-gou, Takachiho-gou	TAKACHIHO	
	Approx. 3 hours 2 buses a day Reservation Required		



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