

Miare Festival

Every year on October 1st fishermen bring portable shrines across the water from Oshima to Hetsu-miya, which is located on the main island of Kyushu, so that the three deities can gather there.



Three Female Deities

The ancient Munakata clan performed rituals on Okinoshima, and their faith in the *kami* that inhabited the island eventually led to the worship of the Three Female Deities of Munakata that continues today. Okinoshima forms one part of Munakata Taisha, the shrine dedicated to these three deities that also includes sacred sites on the island of Oshima and the main island of Kyushu. This set of beliefs has been passed down together with traditions associated with Okinoshima, such as taboos concerning visitors and the worship of the island from afar.

View of Okinoshima from Okitsu-miya Yohaisho

A site was created from which Okinoshima could be viewed and worshipped from a distance, since taboos have long prohibited the public from visiting the island.

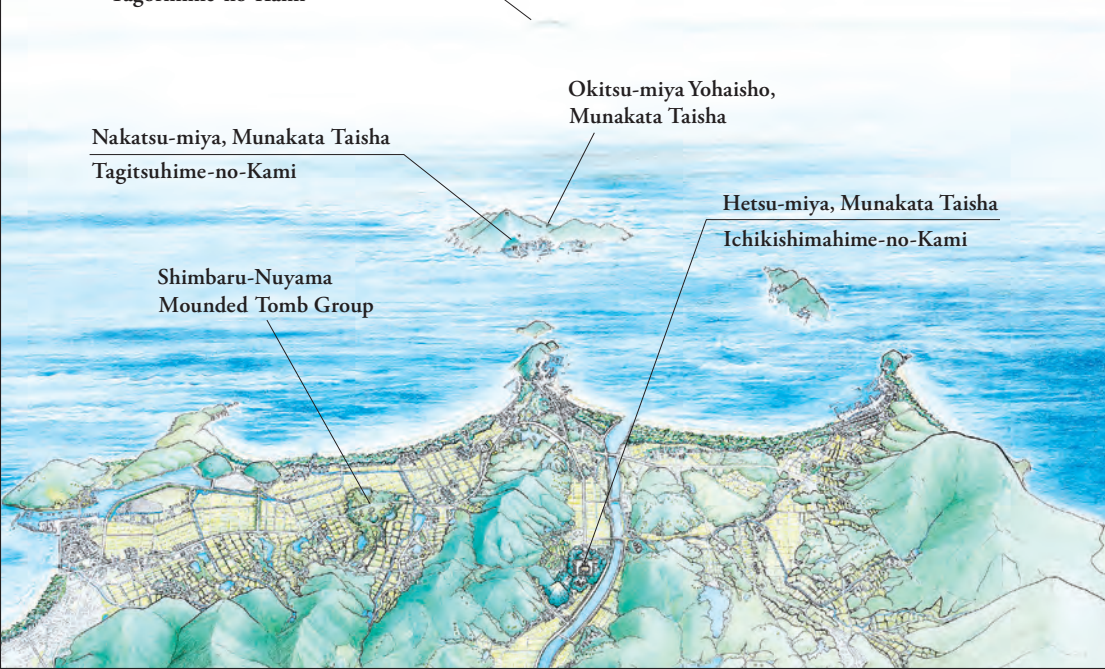
Okitsu-miya, Munakata Taisha
(Okinoshima, Koyajima, Mikadobashira, Tenguwa)
Tagorihime-no-Kami

Nakatsu-miya, Munakata Taisha
Tagitsuhime-no-Kami

Okitsu-miya Yohaisho,
Munakata Taisha

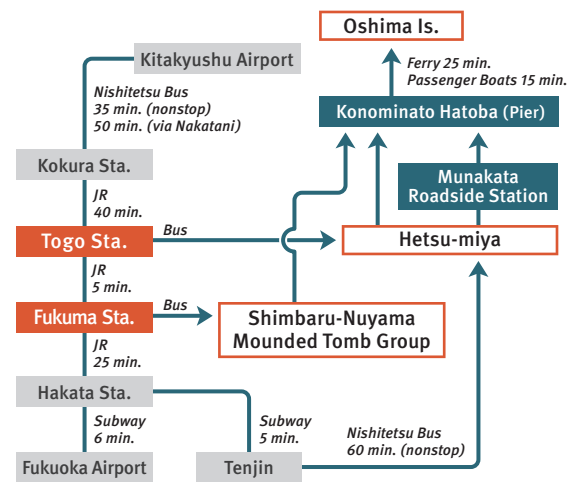
Hetsu-miya, Munakata Taisha
Ichikishimahime-no-Kami

Shimbaru-Nuyama
Mounded Tomb Group



Visiting this World Heritage Site

Travel to the Munakata Region



*Please note that landing on Okinoshima is prohibited.



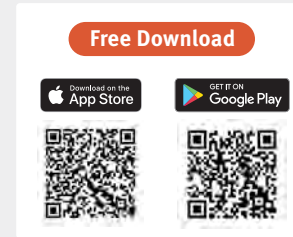
United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Sacred Island of Okinoshima and
Associated Sites in the Munakata Region
inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2017

Okinoshima Finder (iOS / Android App)

This app indicates the location of the sacred island of Okinoshima, which is situated 60 km off the western coast of Kyushu. The map function within the app offers a multilingual introduction to the component sites that make up this World Heritage property and the specific points from which Okinoshima is visible.



A World Heritage Site for Future Generations

The Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region was inscribed on the World Heritage list in July 2017. As you explore the property we ask for your consideration and care in making sure that this treasure for all humanity will be protected for future generations.

- Entry into ritual sites and tomb areas is prohibited.
- The sightseeing route passes through private residential areas. Please do not enter private lots or discard litter on private property.
- Please use caution during your visit, as the sightseeing route traverses dangerous spots such as roadways and narrow mountain paths.

For additional details, please contact us as follows:

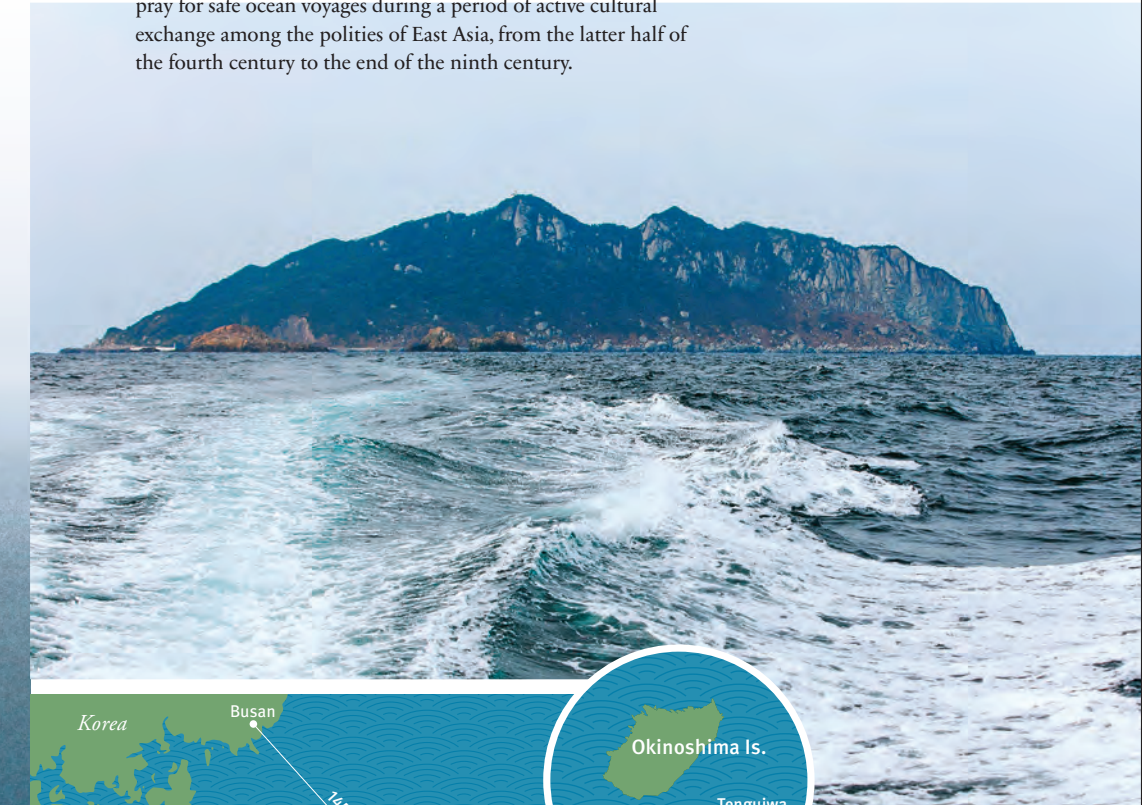


www.okinoshima-heritage.jp
Preservation and Utilization Council of "Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region"
Headquarters: World Heritage Division, Fukuoka Prefecture
Phone: 092-643-3162 Fax: 092-643-3163 E-mail: sekaiisan@pref.fukuoka.lg.jp

Illustration by Yoko Kitano
March 2018

A Sacred Island

Located approximately 60 kilometres off the western coast of Kyushu, Okinoshima has been worshipped since ancient times as an island inhabited by deities, or *kami*. Ancient ritual sites unlike those found anywhere else have survived on the island to this day. They reveal much about the rituals that were conducted there to pray for safe ocean voyages during a period of active cultural exchange among the polities of East Asia, from the latter half of the fourth century to the end of the ninth century.



The Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region



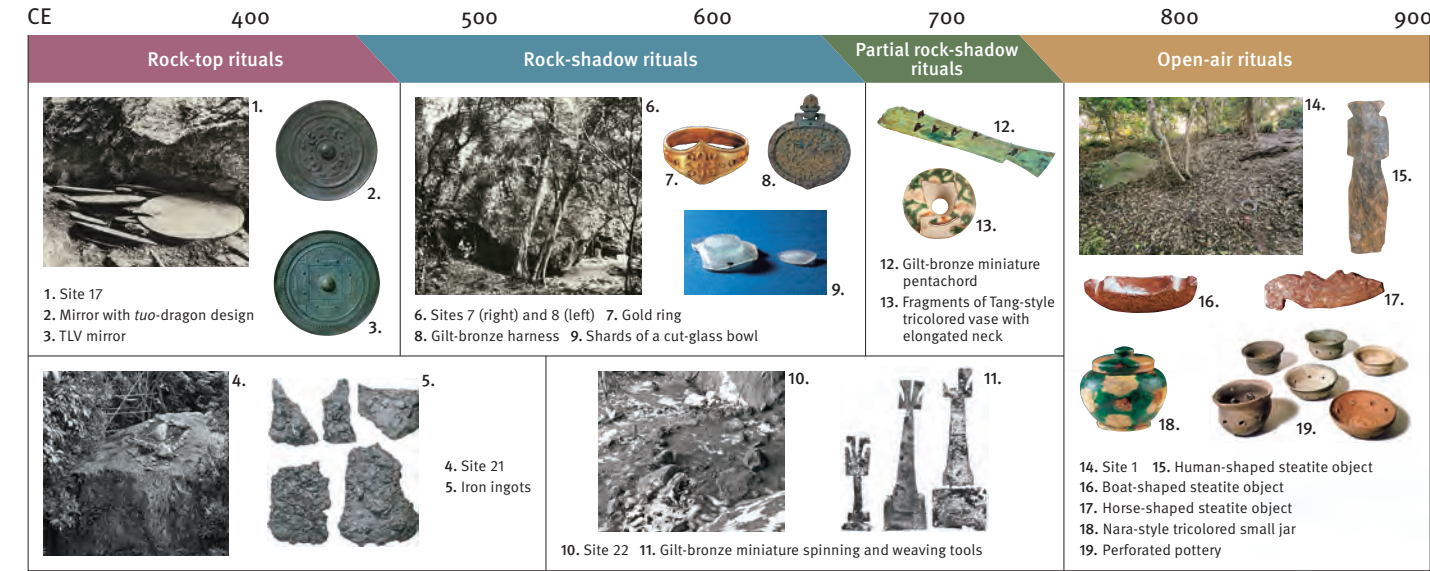
- A Okitsu-miya, Munakata Taisha (Okinoshima, Koyajima, Mikadobashira, Tenguwa)
- B Okitsu-miya Yohaisho, Munakata Taisha
- C Nakatsu-miya, Munakata Taisha
- D Hetsu-miya, Munakata Taisha
- E Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group

Okitsu-miya, Munakata Taisha

(Okinoshima, Koyajima, Mikadobashira, Tenguiwa)

Ancient Rituals and Overseas Exchanges

Changes in Okinoshima Ritual Sites



Approximately 80,000 ritual objects discovered through archaeological surveys have been collectively designated as a national treasure, and include many items brought from overseas, including objects from the Korean peninsula, mainland China, and even Persia (Iran).

Near the huge rock formations found at the center of Okinoshima, several ritual archaeological sites have been preserved almost untouched for more than a thousand years. These rituals evolved through four stages over a span of some five hundred years, during which active overseas cultural exchanges with other polities in the region were taking place. These important archaeological sites

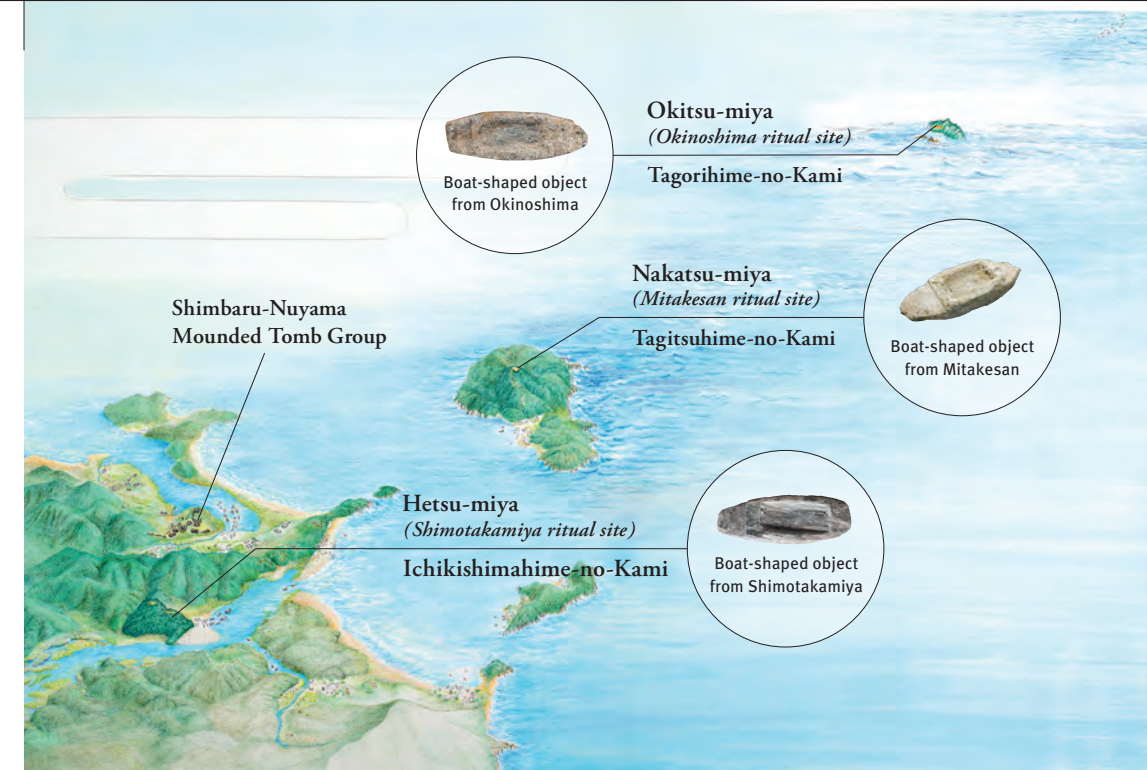
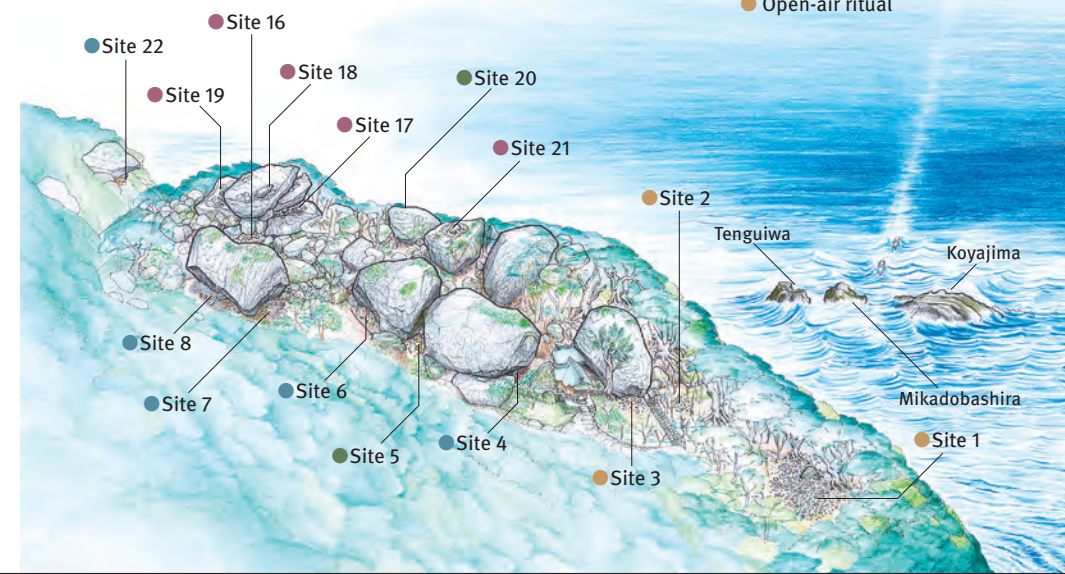
reveal much about how people at that time prayed for safe ocean voyages in a way that reflected their nature-oriented faith.

The entire island constitutes the precinct of Okitsu-miya, which is part of the Munakata Taisha shrine complex, and the island has long been protected by taboos that prevent people from visiting it, since it is known as a place where *kami* dwell.

Okinoshima Taboos

- ▶ Visitors must not speak of anything they have seen or heard on the island.
- ▶ Visitors must not take anything from the island, not even a twig, a blade of grass or a stone.
- ▶ Visitors to the island must purify themselves by bathing naked in the sea, a Shinto ritual called *misogi*.

- Rock-top ritual
- Rock-shadow ritual
- Partial rock-shadow ritual
- Open-air ritual



Okinoshima and the Three Female Deities of Munakata



Okitsu-miya Shrine Buildings

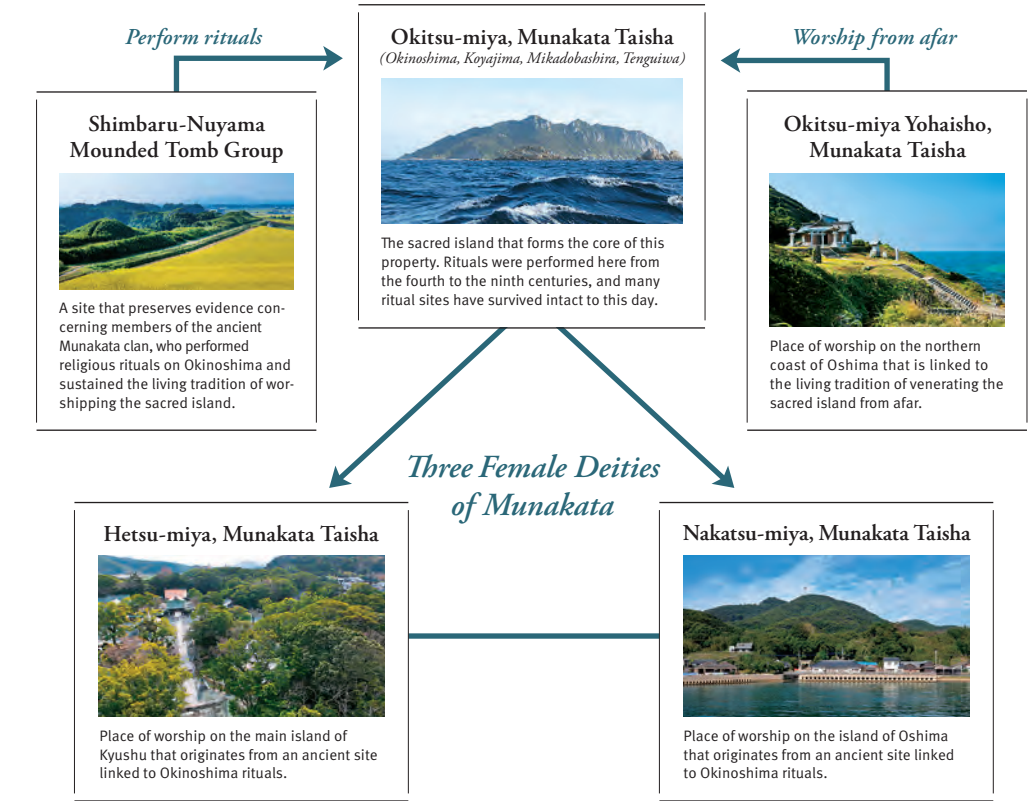


Mitakesan Ritual Site

Okinoshima has long been viewed as a guardian deity of the sea routes leading from the Japanese archipelago to the Korean peninsula, and for this reason state rituals were conducted there for centuries. From the latter half of the seventh century onward, similar rituals began to take place on Oshima and Kyushu. Characteristic objects similar to those used in rituals on Okinoshima have been discovered at the summit of Mt. Mitake, the highest point on Oshima, and on the grounds of Hetsu-miya (the Shimotakamiya ritual site) on Kyushu. The oldest historical records in Japan, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) and *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), both compiled in the early eighth century, indicate that the Munakata clan performed rituals dedicated to the three female deities in these three places. This tradition reflects the origin of the three shrines of Munakata Taisha, each of which enshrines one of the three deities.

The three female deities' names are "Tagori" (or "Takiri"), which means "fog"; "Tagitsu" which means "Swirling Tide," and "Ichiki-shima" (or "Itsuki-shima"), which refers to the island where the *kami* are enshrined. Perhaps the faith in three female deities originated with the prayers for safe ocean voyages that were conducted on Okinoshima.

Component Sites



World Heritage Site Characteristics

Criteria (ii)

Exhibits an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design.

The sacred island of Okinoshima exhibits important interchanges and exchanges amongst various polities in East Asia from the fourth to the ninth centuries, which is evident from the abundance of objects discovered from a variety of origins deposited at sites on the island where rituals for safe navigation were performed. The changes in object distribution and site organisation attest to changes in the rituals, which in turn reflect the nature of the process of dynamic exchange that was taking place during that period, when polities based on the Chinese mainland, the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago were developing a sense of identity that substantially contributed to the formation of Japanese culture.

Criteria (iii)

Bears a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.

Okinoshima is an exceptional example of the cultural tradition of worshipping a sacred island, as it has evolved and been passed down from ancient times to the present. Remarkably, archaeological sites have been preserved on the island virtually intact, and provide a chronological record of how the rituals performed there changed over a period of some five hundred years. The worship of the island continued in the form of devotion to the Three Female Deities of Munakata at the three shrines of Munakata Taisha—Okitsu-miya on Okinoshima, Nakatsu-miya on Oshima, and Hetsu-miya on Kyushu—in addition to the veneration of the island itself from afar.



Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group

This group of tombs belongs to members of the ancient and powerful Munakata clan, who conducted rituals on Okinoshima, and developed the early worship of the *kami* of Okinoshima into a broader faith in the Three Female Deities of Munakata. A total of 41 tombs date from the fifth to the sixth centuries: five keyhole-shaped tombs, thirty-five round tombs, and one square tomb. These burial mounds of various sizes and shapes were built along a plateau that overlooks low-lying farmland which was then a sea inlet, and



Reconstructed image of original layout

the Genkai Sea beyond. They seem to have been built with this view of the sea in mind (see image at lower left).

Keyhole-shaped and large round tombs are constructed in the central part of the plateau, with small to medium-sized round tombs distributed nearby. The keyhole-shaped tombs are associated with powerful members of the Yamato state. This group of burial mounds reveals much about the character of the powerful ancient Munakata clan, which expanded its influence by leading ocean voyages to the Korean peninsula and conducting rituals on Okinoshima on behalf of the state.

Visitor Center

Camellia Stage Historical Museum

In addition to the Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group, artifacts associated with the ancient Munakata clan that have been excavated from the tombs in Fukutsu City are also on display.

Hours: 11:00–21:00
Closed Tuesdays and the last Wednesday of every month
This facility will remain open on national holidays, but will be closed the following day.
1-7-2 Tsuyazaki, Fukutsu city
Phone: 0940-72-1207



Hetsu-miya, Munakata Taisha

Hetsu-miya, located on the main island of Kyushu, is one of the three Munakata Taisha shrines dedicated to the Three Female Deities of Munakata. Ichikishimahime is the main deity enshrined there.

The Shimotakamiya ritual site is situated on a hill overlooking a former sea inlet near the Tsurikawa River. The existence of this site later led to the construction of the shrine buildings at the base of the hill. The descendants of the Munakata clan, the family of the Munakata Daiguji (grand priest), prospered through foreign trade; and on the grounds of Hetsu-miya, which was the headquarters of the faith during the medieval period, they constructed the primary shrine building (which is today the main hall), and the secondary and tertiary shrines, all adjacent to each other, important elements of which have survived to the present day.

The main hall that exists today was rebuilt by the last Daiguji, Munakata Ujisada, and the worship hall was rebuilt by Kobayakawa Takage, who governed Chikuzen Province on Kyushu at the end of the sixteenth century. Both buildings are designated as important cultural properties.

One part of the Shimotakamiya ritual site is a ritual area called Takamiya Saijo, where Shinto rituals are conducted in the open air (see image at upper right).



Takamiya Saijo

Visitor Center

Shimpo-kan Museum, Munakata Taisha

In addition to some 80,000 votive objects discovered on Okinoshima that have been collectively designated a national treasure, ancient documents and other cultural artifacts that reflect the history of Munakata Taisha are displayed.

Hours: 9:00–16:30
Every day of the week
2331 Tashima, Munakata City
(Located inside of the Hetsu-miya compound)
Phone: 0940-62-1311



Nakatsu-miya, Munakata Taisha

Nakatsu-miya is one of the three shrines of Munakata Taisha that are dedicated to the Three Female Deities of Munakata. As a spiritual center for the people of Oshima, it enshrines the deity Tagitsumi.

A shrine was built on elevated ground at the foot of Mt. Mitake, facing the sea, to carry on the traditions that had originated with the Mitakesan ritual site at the summit of the mountain. Sixteenth-century textual sources confirm that by then there were two parallel shrines at this site: Mitake Shrine at the summit of the mountain (the upper shrine), and Nakatsu-miya at the base of the mountain (the main shrine). Eighteenth-century drawings indicate a mountain path connecting the summit and base (see figure at right). The current main hall was rebuilt in the seventeenth century, and has been designated as a tangible cultural property of Fukuoka prefecture.

The summit of Mt. Mitake offers a sweeping view of the Genkai Sea, including Okinoshima and the islands of Iki and Tsushima to the north. The view to the south is of the main island of Kyushu, extending from Kitakyushu City to the Fukuoka City metropolitan area. From here one can directly experience the importance role that Oshima has played in the history of marine traffic in the region.



"Drawing of Oshima" (section) included in the *Chikuzen-no-kami zoku fudoki furoku*, 1797 (owned by the Hiraoka family)



Okitsu-miya Yohaisho, Munakata Taisha

This shrine is located approximately 48 kilometres from Okinoshima, on the northern coast of the island of Oshima. The shrine faces in the direction of Okinoshima, and functions as a place from which to worship the island from afar. A shrine has been established here since at least the early eighteenth century, and on a cloudless day Okinoshima is clearly visible from this site (see figure below). Devotees are generally not allowed to visit the island, and during the Edo period

(1603–1868) the Shinto rituals of Okitsu-miya were often performed here instead.

The wives of Oshima fishermen traditionally offer prayers here for their husbands' safe fishing voyages to Okinoshima. Today the Great Festival of Okitsu-miya is held there every spring and fall, and at that time the shrine's doors and windows that are normally kept closed are opened, and Okinoshima is venerated from afar.



Okitsu-miya Yohaisho and Okinoshima (in the 1960's)

Visitor Center

Oshima Koryu-kan (Oshima Cultural Center)

This facility offers displays and explanations about the deep historical connection between Okinoshima and Oshima, particularly regarding Nakatsu-miya and Okitsu-miya Yohaisho as places of worship.

Hours: 10:00–16:00 daily
Closed Tuesdays
This facility will remain open on national holidays, but will be closed the following day.
Phone: 0940-72-2797



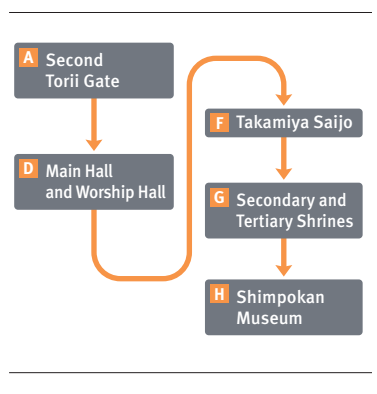
Hetsu-miya, Munakata Taisha



Access

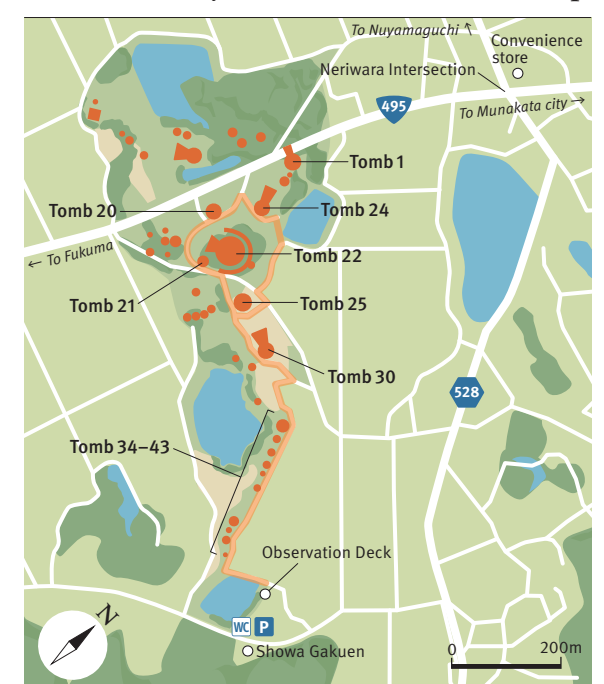
From Togo Station, take the Nishitetsu bus for ten minutes, and get off at the Munakata Taisha-mae stop.

Recommended Route



Leisurely walking course (about 1.3 km)
Duration: About 30 minutes

Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group



Access

1. Take the Nishitetsu bus from Fukuma Station for 25 minutes and get off at Nuyama-guchi. From there it is a fifteen-minute walk to arrive in the vicinity of Tomb 24.

2. From Fukuma Station Miyaji-guchi, take the Fukutsu minibus for 24 minutes, and get off at Showa Gakuen. The bus arrives at the observation deck for the property.

To Camellia Stage
Take the Nishitetsu bus from Fukuma Station, and get off at Fukutsu-shi Bunka Kaikan-mae.

To Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group from Camellia Stage
1. Take the Nishitetsu bus from Higashi-machi, and get off at Nuyama-guchi.
2. From the Camellia Stage, take a Fukutsu minibus for 22 minutes, and get off at Showa Gakuen.

Leisurely walking course (about 2 km)
Duration: About 40 minutes

Visitor Center

Uminomichi Munakatakan Museum

In addition to a 3D movie theater that introduces viewers to the experience of being on Okinoshima, this facility offers an explanatory overview of the entire property.

Hours: 9:00–18:00 Closed Mondays
This facility will remain open on national holidays, but will be closed the following day.
588 Fukata, Munakata City
Phone: 0940-62-2600



Nakatsu-miya, Munakata Taisha



Okitsu-miya Yohaisho, Munakata Taisha



Oshima Ferry Timetable

Service	From Konominato	From Oshima
1	7:40	6:50
2	9:25	8:35
3	11:15	10:15
4	13:50	13:00
5	15:30	14:40
6	17:10	16:20
7	19:00	18:00

Leisurely walking course (about 7 km)
Duration: About 2.5 hours

Bus route: Oshima sightseeing bus
(7 trips per day, running between the Ferry Terminal and the canon fort ruins)

Oshima