

Munakata Taisha Museum
SHIMPOKAN

Opening times 09:00-16:30 (Last entry 16:00)

Closing days Open all year
* The museum may close for special events or maintenance.

Admission Admission fee / Facility maintenance support fee
¥800 (adults)
¥500 (high school and university students)
¥400 (elementary and junior high school students)

* ¥200 reduction per person for groups of 20 or more and persons 65 or older.
* Access the QR code below for details about who is eligible for free entry.

Address & Access 2331 Tashima, Munakata City, Fukuoka 811-3505, Japan
Telephone 0940-62-1311

Access

- Five-minute walk from "Munakata Taisha-mae" bus stop, on the Nishitetsu Bus from JR Togo Station
- 20 minutes by car from Wakamiya Interchange on the Kyushu Expressway

* Access the QR code below for detailed maps of the shrine precincts and other information.

Requests to visitors



- Please do not touch the exhibits and the exhibit cases.
- Please refrain from speaking on mobile phones in the exhibit halls.
- Please view the exhibits quietly and act with consideration for other visitors.
- No smoking, eating or drinking inside Shimpokan.
- Please look after your valuables.

For any other inquiries, please ask at the entrance reception desk.

World Heritage Site
Munakata Taisha Museum
SHIMPOKAN

Collection of the National Treasures
of Okinoshima

Home to 1,700 years of living history



SHIMPOKAN
- Munakata Taisha
Museum



World Heritage Site
Sacred Island of Okinoshima
and Associated Sites
in the Munakata Region

Introducing Shimpokan, Munakata Taisha Museum

Welcome to Shimpokan, since 1980 home to more than 80,000 artifacts of national and global importance that testify to the rich skills and aesthetic sensibilities of ancient artisans, whose works formed part of dynamic overseas exchanges, and which convey the reverence for the Three Goddesses of Munakata and the history of faith at Munakata Taisha. The ritual objects exhibited at Shimpokan date from the 4th century, when they were first offered in rituals held on the sacred island of Okinoshima, and also include items originating from as far away as central Asia, illustrating the richly complex history of overland and maritime exchange that flourished in this region from 1,700 years ago.

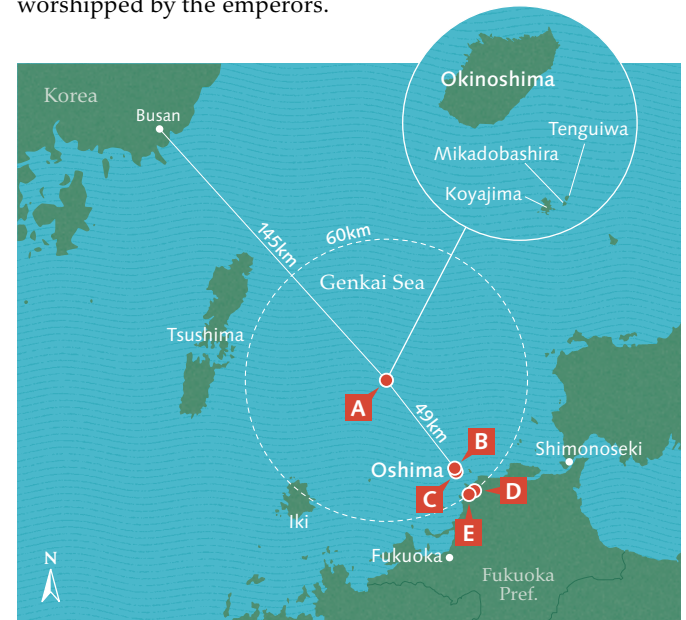


The Three Goddesses of Munakata and Munakata Taisha



Munakata Taisha is a Shinto shrine covering a vast sacred area linked by the sea, composed of three shrines, Okitsu-miya on the sacred island of Okinoshima, 60km off the Kyushu mainland, Nakatsu-miya on the island of Oshima, and Hetsu-miya on the mainland. Each of these three shrines is dedicated to one of the Three Goddesses of Munakata.

The sacred island of Okinoshima has long been revered as an island where the gods dwell. It was this reverence that led to the belief in the Three Goddesses of Munakata, who were also worshipped in state-organized rituals. Japan's oldest historical text the *Nihon Shoki* records how it was Amaterasu, the sun goddess, who issued a divine edict that the Three Goddesses, who protected the sea routes from northern Kyushu to the Korean peninsula, were to assist the emperors of Japan and in turn be worshipped by the emperors.



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

A to **E** are the component properties that together comprise the UNESCO World Heritage Site of The Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region

Upper: Main hall and worship hall, Okitsu-miya
 Middle: Main hall and worship hall, Nakatsu-miya
 Lower: Main hall and worship hall, Hetsu-miya

Okinoshima

People of the ancient world believed that natural objects and phenomena were imbued with mystical powers, and they held them in awe. So it was with Okinoshima, an island that at times could be seen glinting in the sunlight on azure seas, or at other times covered with foreboding dark clouds. It was likely these ever-changing aspects of Okinoshima that gave rise to the belief in a divine presence.

In ancient times the Genkai Sea was the main route for interaction and exchange with the Asian continent. The sight of Okinoshima, its imposing cliffs rising majestically in the waters between northern Kyushu and the Korean peninsula, has long inspired people to believe in the existence of a deity. As belief in the sacredness of Okinoshima deepened, a customary taboo on travel to the island arose, shrouding the island in a further veil of mystery for centuries.

In 1954 an excavation survey on Okinoshima uncovered 22 ancient and large-scale ritual sites that had been used over a 500-year period from the late 4th to 9th centuries. More than 80,000 votive offerings were discovered at these sites. It was the long-standing taboo on travel to the island that had helped to ensure that the sites of ancient state rituals remained miraculously untouched over the course of the centuries.



Site 7 (L) and Site 5 (R). Behind the main hall of Okitsu-miya is a group of massive rocks, some towering over 10 m in height. The ritual sites of Site 7 are located in the shadow of these rocks, while those of Site 5 are found both in the shadow of the rocks and out in the exposed areas in front of the rocks.

Three sacred treasures of the divine rock abode

The state rituals of Okinoshima were conducted on or around a cluster of massive rocks, known as “iwakura” or “rock abode,” where it was believed the Goddess would temporarily descend from the heavens. From the late 4th to 5th centuries these rituals were conducted directly on top of these massive rocks, and in later centuries were relocated to take place in their shadow, before being moved again to be conducted in more exposed sites away from the shadow of the rocks. As the sites of the rituals changed, so too did the kinds of votive offerings made to the Goddess.

At the “rock abode” sites on the top of rocks the majority of items found were mirrors, swords and comma-shaped beads, known as the “three sacred treasures,” which are still part of the Japanese emperor’s imperial regalia today, and are also similar to the grave goods found in large-scale burial mounds of the same era. It was believed that these sacred treasures possessed special divine powers, and were considered essential for rituals.



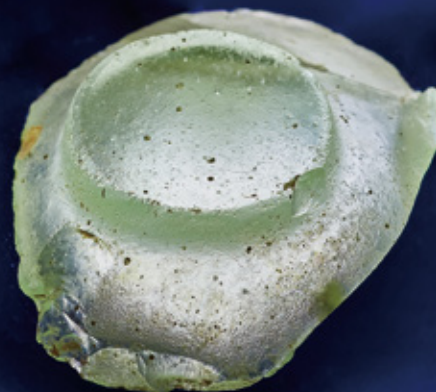
1. National Treasure: Triangular-rimmed deity-and-beast mirror, 3rd century
2. National Treasure: TLV mirror, 4th-5th century
3. National Treasure: Sword, dagger, and silver ornamental part, 6th century
4. National Treasure: Agate comma-shaped bead, age undetermined
5. National Treasure: Glass beads, 6th-7th century

Traces of the Silk Road on Okinoshima

1. National Treasure: Gold ring, 5th-6th century
2. National Treasure: Fragment of a cut glass bowl, 5th-7th century
3. National Treasure: Gilt bronze prickly-leaf-shaped harness pendant, 6th-7th century
4. National Treasure: Gilt bronze heart-shaped harness pendant, 6th-7th century
5. National Treasure: Gilt bronze crupper ornaments with pendant leaves, 6th-7th century



1.



2.

The state rituals on Okinoshima started as a result of increased interaction in the late 4th century between Wa (ancient Japan) and Baekje on the Korean peninsula, with exchanges occurring on various levels between the ancient states. While incorporating culture and technologies from the Asian continent, the people of Wa continued to develop their own unique culture. From the late 5th century onwards the rituals had moved to take place in the shadow of the massive rocks and the votive offerings discovered at those sites include gilt bronze horse harnesses and a gold ring originating from the kingdom of Silla on the Korean peninsula. What is more, a fragment of cut glass has been identified as originating in ancient Persia. These are truly priceless cultural goods that illustrate the rich interaction along the Silk Road linking East and West by both land and sea.



3.



4.



5.

The astonishing accuracy of miniature offerings

From the late 7th century, when rituals moved to more exposed and open sites, the votive offerings changed to become extremely precise metal miniature replicas of various objects that were believed to be used by the deities and therefore considered to have special significance. Offerings such as vessels, spinning and weaving tools, and musical instruments found on Okinoshima in many cases predate similar offerings made at Ise Jingu (Ise Grand Shrine), and as such are priceless artifacts that tell the story behind the establishment of ancient rituals that form the foundation for unique Japanese systems of belief.

As evidence of further international interactions, unique gilt-bronze dragon head ornaments and fragments of Tang Dynasty-style glazed pottery that were presented as votive offerings are believed to have been brought from China by Japanese envoys, demonstrating how Munakata took on a central role in diplomacy and international relations in what were tumultuous times in East Asia.



2.



3.

1. National Treasure: Pair of gilt-bronze dragon head ornaments, 6th century
2. National Treasure: Gilt bronze miniature of an ancient musical instrument with five strings, 7th century
3. National Treasure: Fragments of Tang Dynasty-style three-colored bottle-shaped vase with long neck, 7th century
4. National Treasure: Gilt bronze miniatures of spinning and weaving tools (yarn hangers), 7th century

1.



4.



Prayers engraved in stone

1. National Treasure: Steatite human-shaped figure, 8th-9th century
2. National Treasure: Steatite horse-shaped figure, 8th-9th century
3. National Treasure: Steatite boat-shaped figure, 8th-9th century
4. National Treasure: Nara-style three-colored small jars, 8th century



1. 2.



3.



By the 8th century the rituals of Okinoshima had moved to open locations and in addition to large volumes of ritual-use earthenware, soapstone representations of people, horses and ships were also offered. These soapstone objects are unique to Munakata and they demonstrate how local traditions were respected under the new ritual system of the ancient state. The Nara-style three-colored small jars testify to how culture and glazing techniques from China were introduced to Japan in the 8th century. Following the abolition of the envoy system with Tang Dynasty China at the end of the 9th century, state rituals on Okinoshima ceased to be held. Instead, rituals to honor the Three Goddesses of Munakata moved from Okinoshima to Hetsu-miya on the mainland, heralding a new era.



4.

A new era for the Munakata Daiguji

The Munakata clan were influential feudal lords who had nurtured deep links with the central government. It was the Munakata clan who governed the region named after them and they were also the chief worshippers of the Three Goddesses of Munakata, serving as priests of Munakata Taisha. It was in 979 when Munakata Ujiyoshi became the first of his clan to be made Daiguji (high priest) of Munakata by the Daijo-kan (Great Council of State), a tradition that would continue thereafter. From the end of the 12th century the Munakata Daiguji became retainers of the Kamakura shogunate, and in their position as military retainers they assumed leadership of the Munakata region. It was at this time that a new era of overseas exchange unfolded, based on the ancient arts of navigation and diplomacy. Trade was particularly active with merchants of the Southern Song Dynasty of

1. Important Cultural Property: Pair of lion-like *komainu* guardian figures, dedicated in 1201
2. Important Cultural Property: Historical documents of Munakata Taisha, 12th-18th centuries
3. Important Cultural Property: Buddhist Sutras of Tripitaka as transcribed by Priest Shikijo, 1187-1227
4. Important Cultural Property: *Amidakyo* (the Sukuhavati Sutra) Stone, 1195

China in the 12th and 13th centuries, and from the 15th to 16th centuries interactions with the Joseon Dynasty on the Korean peninsula flourished. Historical documents in the collections of Munakata Taisha recount the activities of the Munakata Daiguji during that era, and artifacts that attest to the history of exchange with Song China, including the *Amidakyo* (the Sukuhavati Sutra) Stone, the stone lion-like *komainu* guardian figures, and the Buddhist Sutras of Tripitaka as transcribed by Priest Shikijo are recognized as being of national historic significance.



1.

2.

3.

4.

Deep-rooted devotion and belief in the sacredness of Okinoshima



Although at one point it seemed that the Munakata Daiguji were doomed to lose their lands and influence, from the early 17th century the Kuroda family, the feudal lords of the Fukuoka domain, provided strong support and patronage for the traditions and beliefs of Munakata, opening up a new chapter for Munakata Taisha, which grew to become one of the principle shrines in all of Kyushu. The third feudal lord, Kuroda Mitsuyuki was particularly deep in his devotion, building subordinate shrines around Hetsu-miya and developing the shrine precincts. Perhaps the most spectacular of all the items dedicated by Lord Kuroda, are the dagger and the Votive Framed Pictures of Thirty-Six Immortal Poets (by Kano Yasunobu, Fukuoka Prefecture Tangible Cultural Heritage), which were presented at the time of the completion of building work.

Already by the 17th century scholars were noting the taboos and tradition of *imikotoba* (euphemisms used in place of certain taboo words) that had grown up around Okinoshima, and how it was referred to as "Oiwazusama," or "the island that must not be named," a special, mystical place that was home to a special faith. This demonstrates just how deep-rooted the taboos surrounding Okinoshima were. It is the piety of people that helped to protect the sites of Okinoshima, and could also be said to have breathed new life into the ancient state rituals and sustained belief in the Three Goddesses to the present.

1. & 2. Fukuoka Prefecture Designated Cultural Property: Votive Framed Pictures of Thirty-Six Immortal Poets, dedicated in 1680
3. Dagger, with sheath: (Front inscription) First Shrine of Munakata; (Reverse inscription) Name of Minamoto-no-Nobukuni Yoshisada, Inhabitant of Chikuzen Province, dedicated in 1685



1. Nakatsukasa



2. Ariwara no Narihira



3.