

Culture (short version)

Ise-Shima National Park allows visitors to experience local traditions, customs, and festivals which have a deep connection with nature.

For thousands of years, the sun deity Amaterasu-Omikami has been worshipped in Japan as a symbol of the sun. Sunlight, of course, is essential for life. Ise Jingu, the most important *jinja* (Shinto shrine) complex in the country, lies at the center of this belief.

Today, local culture is still characterized by ancient rituals and festivals giving thanks for harvests and catches. These festivals are held in and around Ise Jingu. One of them is Ise Jingu's Kanname-sai festival—the offering of the first rice grown every October. Fishermen and female divers known as *ama* visit shrines and temples to pray for safety at sea. Ise Jingu's associated *jinja*, Izawa-no-miya, is just one of the places of worship where fishing and agricultural communities can receive this blessing. Lively festivals celebrate people's health and the plentiful harvests.

Around Ise-Shima, visitors may also find many ancient symbols connected to warding off evil spirits and praying for safety at sea. These include *shimenawa* rice straw ropes above the entrances to buildings and the star-and-lattice designs on *ama* divers' clothing and equipment.