

## **View of Southern Shimbara and Beyond**

You are facing the southern region of the Shimabara Peninsula, though landmarks as far away as Mt. Aso and the city of Kumamoto can be seen to the east on clear days. The fertile farmland of the plains surrounding these mountains is the largest agricultural area in Nagasaki, and the fast-moving waters of the Ariake Sea beyond are rich with fish, and a favorite playground for dolphins. In the distance are the Amakusa Islands, part of the Unzen-Amakusa National Park.

It was from this peninsula that the Shimabara Rebellion was launched in 1637 by a coalition of those disgruntled by higher taxes and the persecution of Catholics. The rebellion, led by a 16-year-old boy, ended at Hara Castle on the south coast of this peninsula, where over 120,000 soldiers of the shogunate forces eventually overwhelmed the rebel defenders on April 15, 1638, after a long siege. More than 20,000 rebels and their sympathizers were beheaded in the aftermath. Following this uprising, the shogunate chose to cut Japan off contact with most of the outside world, and stricter policies against Christians drove the religion underground. Only the castle's ruins remain today.

Behind you, if you turn to your left, is the newest addition to the mountain, which you can easily identify from its barren surface. Mt. Heisei-shinzan is a lava dome that grew from a recent eruption beginning in November 1990. This is one of the best perspectives for viewing the routes of the resulting pyroclastic flows, some of which reached the sea. If you look closely, you'll notice that there are spots of green where plants and trees are beginning to get a foothold—the beginnings of reforestation on the mountainside.