

## **Hellish Tales: Exploring the *Jigoku***

Several clearly marked sites are connected with historical events or legendary tales that have been passed down over the years. “Oito’s Hell,” a greenish pool of boiling water, memorializes the tale of Oito, an adulteress who murdered her husband to be with her wealthy lover. When this spring erupted around the time of her execution, it was given its name as a warning that those who damage their households will go to hell. A similar site is called “Seishichi’s Hell,” named after a Christian who was executed for refusing to renounce his religion. And “Shrieking Hell” is surely one of the most spine-chilling spots—its gases escaping with such power that the sounds could be imagined as the shrieks and groans of the souls of the damned.

### **Martyrdom of the faithful**

On the hill overlooking the barren landscape stands a cross and a memorial honoring Christian martyrs. More than thirty of them were tortured and executed here in the early seventeenth century after the shogunate, fearful of the spread of the religion and its ties to colonialism, cracked down on its believers. The oppression of Nagasaki and Shimabara Peninsula Christians is the inspiration behind *Silence*, the novel by renowned author Endo Shusaku (1923–1996) that was made into a film by Martin Scorsese.

### **A challenge in the dark**

Other spots include a mini-volcano-like formation, and one area where visitors can remove their shoes and feel the heat from the earth on carefully placed stones—a real treat in the winter. But even in bright daylight, the sounds and sights of the “hells” can be eerie; in inclement weather or at night, strolling through the hells is a particularly unsettling though intriguing experience.