

## **Kumano Magaibutsu**

These stunning bas-reliefs of Buddhist deities are some of the largest cliff-face carvings in Japan. The figure on the upper right is of Dainichi Nyorai, sometimes called the Cosmic Buddha, and measures some 6.8 meters in height. It was probably carved in the tenth or eleventh century by an accomplished sculptor who had worked in Nara and in Japan's capital of Kyoto. Three mandalas can be seen carved in the rock over its head. The figure on the left is Fudo Myo-o, a deity associated with prayers for safety and health. It is the larger of these two reliefs at 8 meters, and is thought to have been carved in the twelfth century. Most depictions of this deity show a more ferocious figure, and the mild expression here is a rarity. Both of these images are powerful icons of Esoteric Buddhism, in which paradise is achieved through arduous practice and secret teachings. (According to legend, the uneven pattern of the stone steps leading up to these carvings is the creation of an ogre in a rush to build them overnight in return for a promised meal of human flesh.)