

The Culture of the Aso Area

The culture of the people of Aso is inextricably linked to the volcanoes and surrounding natural environment. Evidence of people living in the caldera dates back almost 30,000 years, with many remains being found from the Jomon period (pre-10,000–ca. 5th century BCE). Mainly found on the top and middle of the outer rims, these remains show that the area within the crater was once covered by a great lake. After the lake disappeared, the area became widespread grasslands. People soon inhabited this relatively flat land, using it for rice cultivation, farming, and as pasture. The grasslands have been maintained for many years through controlled burnings, cutting, and grazing.

Local people have venerated the Aso volcano since ancient times. Many shrines were erected in honor of the mountain, and there are festivals in which rituals are performed to pray for abundant crop harvests, health, and protection from natural disasters. The springtime Hifuri Festival and the summer Onda Festival are held to help ensure plentiful harvests. Yabusame, held every autumn, celebrates the harvesting of crops, and the wintertime Gomaki Festival is an occasion to pray for good health for the following year.

Due to the area's great natural beauty and history, Aso has long been an inspiration to poets and novelists. Natsume Soseki (1867–1916), Ochiai Naobumi (1861–1903), and Tokutomi Roka (1868–1927), three of Japan's great literary figures, have all referred to the beauty of Aso in their writing.