

## Yakusugi

*Yakusugi* is a unique species of very old Japanese cedar tree (*sugi* in Japanese) (*Cryptomeria japonica*) found only on Yakushima. The trees start to appear among broadleaf trees at around 500 m above sea level and can be found up to altitudes over 1000 m. *Yakusugi* have about 30% more resin than other trees thanks to the high rainfall and humidity on Yakushima, making their wood more resistant to rotting than that of other trees. This helps them to live for an extraordinarily long time, some surviving for thousands of years. *Sugi* aged one thousand years or more are bestowed the name *yakusugi*; the others are known as *kosugi*.

Historically *yakusugi* were almost exclusively objects of worship and hardly ever harvested. This started to change with the growing power of the Shimazu clan of Kagoshima in the late sixteenth century. The clan demanded tribute and taxes from Yakushima residents in the form of *yakusugi* wood to use as roof tiles. The use of *yakusugi* wood as lumber grew as modern tools such as the chainsaw made it easier to cut them down. Only after the rediscovery of the ancient Jomon Sugi in 1966 did the logging of *yakusugi* wood gradually cease.