

### **Itsukushima Shrine: Noh Theater**

These noh masks, costumes, and instruments are reminders of the deep and enduring connection between this traditional performing art and Itsukushima Shrine. Noh was first performed on Miyajima in 1568 when the powerful Mohri family was in control of the island and the entire Chugoku region (the westernmost part of Honshu, including present-day Hiroshima Prefecture). Like other local rulers before them, the Mohri held Itsukushima Shrine in high regard and placed it under their patronage. This involved cultivating the arts, including noh, which was particularly popular among the warrior class.

On Miyajima, noh was initially performed on makeshift platforms, but its increasing popularity soon necessitated building a permanent stage. This was accomplished in 1605, and a noh stage has been maintained on the island ever since. The current platform at Itsukushima Shrine, the only noh stage in Japan built over water, dates to 1680 and is designated an Important Cultural Property. Performances of *shin-noh* (noh dedicated to the deities of Itsukushima Shrine) are held on the stage as part of the annual Tokasai (Peach Blossom Festival) from April 16 to 18.