

Exploring the Hetsu-miya Precincts

Hetsu-miya Shrine, located near the Tsurikawa River, is commonly referred to as Munakata Taisha and is the most accessible of Munakata's three shrines. The main sanctuary and worship hall have been designated Important Cultural Properties. Hetsu-miya enshrines Ichikishimahime no Kami, the youngest sister of the Three Female Deities of Munakata.

Entering the Shrine

Passing through the torii gate and proceeding along the path, you come to the main gate (*shinmon*), decorated with the gold chrysanthemum seal of the imperial family, commonly seen at Shinto shrines. Beyond the main gate are the worship hall and the main sanctuary. Before passing through the main gate, most visitors stop at the *temizuya* water pavilion to wash their hands and mouth with cool, flowing water in an act of purification.

The Main Sanctuary

The worship hall, the first structure you see after passing through the main gate, was constructed in 1590. The main sanctuary behind the worship hall was rebuilt after a fire in 1578 by Munakata Ujisada, who was at the time the highest-ranking priest at the shrine. The appearance of the sanctuary, from its curved roof thatched with cypress bark to its intricately carved red eaves, is similar to the design of Itsukushima Shrine at Miyajima in Hiroshima (which was also built to honor the Three Female Deities). Adjacent to the main sanctuary and worship hall are several small subsidiary shrines, which were relocated here from other sites in the Munakata region in 1675.

An Ancient Ritual Site

To the right of the main sanctuary, a path leads up to Takamiya Saijo, the site where the Three Female Deities are said to have descended to earth from the heavens. Takamiya Saijo has been an important ritual site for over a thousand years, predating the shrine itself. To the northwest of the ritual site you can see the sea route linking Hetsu-miya with Okinoshima across the Genkai Sea. As you descend, watch for a path leading to two subsidiary shrines venerating Tagorihime no Kami of Okitsu-miya, and Tagitsuhime no Kami of Nakatsu-miya.

To learn more about the ancient rituals conducted in the Munakata region, visit the Shimpokan Museum within the Hetsu-miya precincts. The museum holds around 80,000 artifacts found at ritual sites on Okinoshima.

