

**Takamiya Saijo**

To the right of the main sanctuary of Hetsu-miya, a long stairway leads up to Takamiya Saijo, in a forest clearing. It is the ritual site where the Three Female Deities of Munakata are said to have first descended from the heavens. The site is a large square of flattened earth covered with small pebbles, with larger stones forming worship spaces. Tree branches on either side of the space meet to form a natural arched roof. Simple places of outdoor worship like this were common before the arrival of Buddhism in the sixth century. Sacred rituals have been conducted at this site and on Okinoshima and Oshima for over a thousand years. On the last day of the Grand Autumn Festival in October, the public can watch the rituals here, including sacred dances by shrine maidens.