

## **The History of Shinto on Okinoshima**

Okinoshima and the shrines associated with it are affiliated with the ancient Shinto religion. Shinto is indigenous to Japan and revolves around the worship of deities, or *kami*, believed to dwell in nature. The early Japanese would recognize a natural object, such as a large tree or boulder, as a place where deities dwell. Straw ropes were used to mark these objects as sacred. In later periods, shrines were sometimes constructed in the vicinity, where worshippers would offer prayers and make offerings.

### **A sacred island**

It was not uncommon for entire mountains or even islands of outstanding beauty, such as Okinoshima, to be considered sacred. Researchers have determined that visitors to Okinoshima between the fourth and ninth centuries offered prayers and precious items to the deities here for protection during sea crossings and as thanks for successful journeys. Around 80,000 votive objects have been found on Okinoshima. Over time, the rituals on the island evolved to include the female deity, Tagorihime no Kami.

### **Purification rituals**

Purity of body, mind, and spirit is important in Shinto, and water or salt are commonly used for purification. Visitors to Shinto shrines ritually purify themselves by washing their hands and mouths. The few visitors allowed on Okinoshima, almost exclusively Shinto priests from Munakata Taisha, must perform whole-body purification in the sea before they visit the island. Although Okinoshima is off-limits to all but a handful of individuals, everyone can venerate the island's kami from Teini-gu at Hetsu-miya on the main island of Kyushu, and from Okitsu-miya Yohaisho on Oshima.