

## KUROSHIMA PAMPHLET COVER

World Cultural Heritage  
Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region

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Villages on Kuroshima Island

### HEADLINE ON RIGHT

Hidden Christian Sites in the Nagasaki Region

### PULL QUOTE ON RIGHT (MIDDLE OF PAGE)

A unique Japanese religious tradition that developed in the absence of foreign missionaries.

### BOLD INTRO TOP RIGHT

This is a group of heritage sites in the Nagasaki region that testify to the traditions of the Hidden Christians. They were believers who persisted with their faith even during the period when Christianity was forbidden and foreign missionaries were excluded from Japan. They were able to hide their faith by simultaneously engaging with the traditional Japanese religions of Shinto and Buddhism and the broader society.

### PICTURE TOP LEFT

Sotome

Migration

Migration

Migration

Migration

The 12 components of this serial property, plus a map showing where the Hidden Christians of Sotome migrated.

### BODY TEXT

#### **I. Missionaries Leave; Christians Go into Hiding**

Christianity was first brought to Japan in 1549 by the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier. Driven by the activities of the missionaries who followed, and under the protection of the converted “Christian daimyo,” who were eager to profit from trading with the Portuguese, the new religion spread throughout the country. The ordinary people of the Nagasaki region enjoyed a long period of direct religious guidance from the missionaries. Faith-based brotherhoods known as *kumi* were created, and Christianity was practiced and sustained using a framework of local leaders.

However, when the Tokugawa shogunate followed Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s 1587 edict to expel the Christian fathers with a complete ban on Christianity in 1614, all the churches in Japan were destroyed and the missionaries driven out of the country. The Christian daimyo and the rest of the ruling class, who had once been so assiduous in adopting Christianity, converted back to Buddhism, while missionaries who slipped into the country secretly and

the Christians who sheltered them were put to death after being subjected to the most gruesome torture. The hunt for Christians in the general populace gradually intensified.

In 1637, with the ban on Christianity being ever more strictly enforced and their local lord behaving ever more tyrannically, the Christians of the Shimabara domain revolted, barricading themselves in **Hara Castle (1)** in the Shimabara Rebellion. This stunned the Tokugawa shogunate, which then forbade Portuguese ships (on which missionaries had been secretly entering the country) from entering Japan's ports, and adopted a policy of national seclusion. The last surviving missionary was martyred in 1644, after which Japan's Christians were forced to maintain their faith without any missionary guidance.

## **II. The Hidden Christian Tradition Evolves**

Even after all contact with the missionaries had been broken off, Hidden Christians remained throughout Japan. They secretly maintained their faith, evading detection and outwardly living as normal members of society. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, a whole series of crackdowns took place. As the Hidden Christians were detected and then suppressed, their communities died out in much of Japan.

But the Nagasaki region was different, as most of the intense missionary work had been done in this area. Even after the start of the eighteenth century, the Nagasaki Christians managed to secretly maintain their religious organizations and develop unique ways of practicing their faith. Different villages worshiped different things: mountains and islands (**Kasuga and Sacred Places in Hirado 2 3**); everyday objects (the village of **Sakitsu in Amakusa 4**); religious pictures (the village of **Shitsu in Sotome 5**); and shrines (the village of Ōno **in Sotome**). Their rituals and sacred objects always looked similar to those used in the practices of Japan's traditional religion, resulting in unique forms of belief.

One reason that Japan's Christians managed to stay hidden for 250 years was the authorities' posture of tacit consent, meaning that as long as the Christians did not openly display their faith, they would not be hunted down, informed on, or punished. This delicate balancing act between concealment on one side and looking away on the other was the background against which the Hidden Christian tradition evolved.