

Hinukan: Shrine to the God of Fire

Hinukan is the god of fire in the indigenous Ryukyuan religion. In ancient times, it is believed that the god gave fire to the priestess in every village to create a village hearth, stipulating that every family should light their own family hearths from that fire. Fire is believed to protect the house and its occupants, and many Okinawan homes to this day have a small shrine to Hinukan in their kitchens. This includes a container of water, a bowl of salt, a flask of *awamori* (Okinawan alcohol), an evergreen branch, and incense. Royal hearths, like the one at Nakijin, had special status and significance, and were believed to protect the royal family and, through them, the entire kingdom. The Nakijin royal Hinukan is located within the Main Ward, alongside an important state hall. Though the last residents of Nakijin Castle left in 1665, a Hinukan shrine was erected in the eighteenth century and continues to serve religious functions. It was moved a short distance in the 1980s to facilitate archaeological excavations.