

## **Momotaro Jinja Shrine**

Momotaro Shrine is a place of both worship and legend, where the characters of the Japanese Peach Boy folktale (*Momotaro*) come to life. The story goes that an elderly, childless couple found a peach floating in a river and discovered a small boy inside. According to local legend these events took place right here on the banks of the Kiso River.

When Momotaro grew up, he left his parents and set out on a journey to fight demons. Along the way, he befriended a talking dog, a monkey, and a pheasant. Peach Mountain (Momoyama), which rises up behind the shrine, is said to be the last place the boy was seen and has been a sacred place since ancient times.

A unique peach-shaped torii gate stands at the entrance to the shrine. The inscription on it reads: “Evil shall leave you, illness will cease to exist, and disaster will not befall you.” The blessing is based on a series of puns—the word *saru* (leave you) is also the word for “monkey.” The word *inu* (cease to exist) is also the word for “dog.” The word *kiji* (will not come) is also the word for “pheasant.” These three animals are Momotaro’s companions.

Local sculptor Shoun Asano (1891–1978) created the many colorful concrete characters from the story that are placed around the grounds. A treasure house holds historical relics related to the *Momotaro* tale.