

Takachiho Shrine: Overview

Although details of its founding remain unknown, Takachiho Shrine is referred to in Japan's "six national histories" (*rikkokushi*) from the Heian period (794–1185) as the highest-ranked Shinto shrine in Hyuga Province, the ancient name for present-day Miyazaki, the prefecture where Takachiho is located. Today it serves as the parent shrine of 88 other shrines in 18 villages in the area. The shrine's main sanctuary and its pair of *komainu* guardian figures have been designated National Important Cultural Properties, while various sites in and around the shrine, both natural and architectural, are believed to be directly related to Japan's creation myth and the tales of its gods and goddesses. Twenty-three deities are worshipped within and around the grounds, 16 of them in the main sanctuary (*honden*) and seven at nearby Aratate Shrine. These divinities are worshipped as guardians of agriculture, thought to assure bountiful harvests and protection against evil spirits. It is said that Takachiho Shrine has also served as a protector of the *yokagura* dance tradition for more than 800 years. Kagura Hall, the venue for regular performances of the dances, is located within the shrine grounds. The shrine's simple architecture is in harmony with the towering trees found throughout the shrine grounds. Among these sacred trees are two, the 800-year old Chichibu Cedar and the Meoto Sugi (Husband and Wife Cedars) pair.