

## **Takachiho Shrine: Meoto-sugi**

To the left of the entrance to the Main Shrine is a pair of immense Japanese cedars (sugi; *Cryptomeria japonica*), known as Meoto-sugi (Husband and Wife Cedars) as they have grown from common roots. The pair of trees symbolize the dedicated husband-and-wife pair, and visitors who circle the tree three times while holding hands with someone they love are believed to be blessed with peaceful relations, a happy and prosperous home, and a family with many children.

Takachiho Shrine is surrounded by a grove of tall and straight cedars that heighten the sense of a place endowed with the presence of the divine. They are adorned with *shimenawa*, which are ropes indicating an object or demarcated space imbued with the spirit of the divine. Often the ropes are adorned with stalks of straw or zig-zag shaped streamers (called *shide*). Cedar trees often grace the approach to shrines, providing seclusion and a natural corridor between the secular and sacred realms as well as shade from the sun.