

## **Ama no Iwato Shrine: Overview**

The shrine of Ama no Iwato (Cave of Heaven) is dedicated to Amaterasu Omikami, the primary divinity in the pantheon of indigenous religious belief. Though commonly known as the Sun Goddess, her full name describes her influence as the Great Divinity Illuminating Heaven. She was assigned to rule the High Celestial Plain of Heaven and is the primary female deity in the pantheon and ultimate progenitor of the line of emperors ruling Japan. It is not surprising, therefore, that the shrine dedicated to her is nestled in a secluded natural setting on the edge of a gorge filled with ancient trees and a fast-flowing river. Behind a green curtain of trees on the far side of the gorge opposite the shrine is the Ama no Iwato cave, where Amaterasu, in the myth that gave birth to the *kagura* dance tradition, hid until she was lured out by the lively dance of the deity Ame no Uzume. Though that cave is hidden from sight, you can observe this mysterious, sacred area from the Ama no Iwato shrine observation deck across the gorge. This site and that of Ama no Yasukawara, the cave where the gods met to decide how to entice Amaterasu out of the Ama no Iwato cave, are under the protection of the shrine.