

## **Kunimigaoka: Observatory / Statue of Ninigi no Mikoto**

Kunimigaoka affords vast panoramas in every direction from a height of 513 meters, with views of various mountain and valley landmarks of the area. To the east is the Takachiho Basin, the setting of several Shinto myths, while to the west, rises the peaks of Japan's largest active volcano, Mt. Aso, and its huge, ancient caldera. But what holds particular interest here is the view of Takachiho's famous rice terraces. Between September and October, the terraces, together with Takachiho Basin, can be seen blanketed by the naturally occurring "sea of clouds" phenomenon. In the legends associated with Kunimigaoka, Ninigi no Mikoto, the grandson of sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami, figures prominently. He was sent to this place, it is said, to plant rice and establish the line of rulers of the land as a direct connection to his grandmother. When Ninigi and his entourage encountered dense clouds on the way down, it is said that he cast "precious" (*taka*) and "numerous" (*chi*) "rice stalks" (*ina-ho*), breaking through the clouds to alight on the earth, and this became the mythical source of the town's name, Takachiho. A statue has been erected atop Kunimigaoka hill to commemorate this legend.