

### **Kaempfer and Birnie Festival**

Every year in April, when spring turns the hills and valleys of Hakone to rich shades of fresh green, local conservationists gather to remember two Europeans who played significant roles in relaying the natural beauty of the region to a wider audience.

Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716) was a German naturalist and physician who came to Japan in 1690 in his capacity as a doctor for the Dutch East India Company. Kaempfer traveled from Nagasaki, the only port open to European ships at the time, to Edo (present-day Tokyo), passing through Hakone on his journeys in 1691 and 1692. In his notes, published posthumously under the title *History of Japan*, Kaempfer praised the beauty of Hakone's scenery. More than two centuries later, his writings touched Cyril Montague Birnie (1868–1958), an Australian merchant who had purchased a second home in Hakone in 1918 and spent much of his free time enjoying the great outdoors there. An active conservationist who moved to the area permanently after retiring and lived there until his arrest and eventual deportation after the outbreak of World War II, Birnie made use of Kaempfer's words to call for the protection of Hakone's environment from industrial development. Held annually since 1986, the Kaempfer and Birnie Festival consists mainly of talks (in Japanese only) themed on the duo's achievements and conservation in general.