

Mori Minashi Hachiman Shrine

A short walk from the center of Gero's hot spring district, Mori Minashi Hachiman Shrine is a spacious and quiet place. The shrine grounds are covered in greenery, including *sugi* (cryptomeria) trees. Ten wooden figures depicting deities, carved in the twelfth century by artisans from the Hida region, sit inside the shrine. The simple figures, designated as Important Cultural Properties, are between 30 and 60 centimeters in height. They are kept behind a locked door, though this does not deter visitors from paying respects to them.

The shrine festival, Tanokami Matsuri, is held every February 14th and is a designated Intangible Cultural Property. The festival celebrates the coming of spring and is an important event for local residents, especially young people, who participate by wearing colorful *hanagasa* (large conical hats covered in flowers) and performing a traditional dance in a celebration known as *dengaku*, which dates to the Middle Ages. The hats are why the festival is sometimes referred to as the Hanagasa Festival. Residents pray for and celebrate (in advance) an ample harvest of rice in the coming year.