

## **Keta Taisha Shrine**

Keta Taisha is the most prominent Shinto shrine of the Noto Peninsula. It is popular among people seeking romance as it enshrines Onamuchi, a deity of love.

Keta Taisha is believed to have existed in some form for over 2,000 years. Its name is first found in the eighth-century *Man'yōshū*, the earliest collection of Japanese poetry. The oldest structures standing today include the *shinmon* gate from 1584 and the *haiden* worship hall from 1654.

The shrine is surrounded by the off-limits, highly sacred woods called Irazu no Mori, or “Untrod Forest.” The inner shrine is deep inside the forest and visited only by the head priest.

Keta Taisha is known for two annual festivals. The first is the Heikokusai Festival from March 18 to 23. In this festival, a large procession carries the deity of Keta Taisha across the Noto Peninsula to the main Keta sub-shrine in Nanao, about 30 kilometers away. The second event is the Umatsuri Festival, which starts with a cormorant being caught in Nanao and declared a deity. It is then brought to Keta Taisha on a three-day journey. The cormorant is released before sunrise on December 16, and the way in which it approaches the shrine is interpreted as a sign foretelling the fortunes of the coming year.