

## **Hokosha Shrine**

Established in 1058, Hokosha retains the oldest extant main building among the shrines of Togakushi, with its present structure dating to 1861. This structure is decorated with intricate wood carvings, including animal representations of the twelve signs of the Chinese Zodiac high up on the walls of the main hall.

Front and center inside Hokosha's main building is a stage for the *kagura*, a traditional dance depicting the legend of Ama no Iwato, "the stone door of heaven." According to this legend, the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami, angered by the behavior of her brother, Susanoo no Mikoto, hid in a cave, plunging the world into darkness. An amusing dance performed by the goddess Ame no Uzume drew laughter from the other gods, and when Amaterasu, curious, peeked out of her cave the god Ame no Tajikarao moved the stone and threw it away, returning light to the world. That stone is said to have landed here, becoming the mountains of Togakushi.

The large wooden storehouse to the right of Hokosha houses two *mikoshi* (portable shrines). Every six years one of these *mikoshi* is carried to Chusha Shrine as part of a festival called the Shikinentaisai, a ritual meeting between Uwaharu no Mikoto, the god enshrined at Hokosha, and his father, enshrined at Chusha.