

## 【Ime Jinja Shrine】

Ime Jinja Shrine enshrines three main deities: Uke Mochi no Kami, the goddess of food; Ame no Uzume no Mikoto, the goddess of dawn, mirth, and revelry; and Ame no Hohi no Mikoto, a deity sent down from heaven to pacify the Central Land of Reed Plains (the mythical country that became Japan). A festival to pray for a bountiful harvest is held annually on July 12, during which a portable shrine is paraded through the village by bearers in ancient aristocratic costume.

The shrine you see before you is not actually the main shrine of Ime Jinja, but a *satomiya*, or local auxiliary shrine. The main shrine sits at the peak of Mt. Naeba, where it was built by practitioners of Shugendō, a syncretic blend of Shinto, Buddhism, who worship sacred mountains as the home of deities, spirits, and the dead. Even today, Shugendō ascetics climb to the shrine on Mt. Naeba to pray for safety and, in late June or early July, to purify the mountain in preparation for the opening of the climbing season.

The origins of both the *satomiya* and the main shrine are unknown, but “Ime Jinja” is listed as a shrine in the Echigo area in the *Engishiki*, a book of laws and customs compiled in 927. However, a separate Ime Jinja Shrine exists in the nearby city of Ōjiya as well, and it is unclear which of the two locations the *Engishiki* refers to. In any case, the Ime Jinja Shrine in Mitsumata most likely dates back to at least the mid-Heian period (794–1185).

The pure mountain stream that flows through the main shrine precincts is home to watercress, char (*iwana*), and an aquatic flowering plant called *baikamo* (*Ranunculus nipponicus*). Luminous moss, which is rarely seen at this elevation, grows under the main hall building.