

## **Minakata Kumagusu Museum**

This museum documents the life of Wakayama-born botanist Minakata Kumagusu (1867–1941). Minakata is remembered for his environmental conservation, his expertise on the subject of slime molds, and his unconventional learning style. Despite dropping out of school, Kumagusu devoted his life to intensive research, becoming a specialist in botany, folklore, philosophy, language, and anthropology. He discovered several new species of slime mold and collected samples in the mountains of Kumano.

In 1906, the Meiji government introduced a shrine consolidation policy to reduce the number of shrines as part of its effort to regularize and control shrines around the country. Kumagusu knew that when shrines were closed, the dense forests that surrounded them would be in danger. He campaigned against the policy, helping to sway public opinion and ultimately save several forests.

Minakata collected slime mold specimens for 14 years in the United States, Cuba, and the UK, where he visited the British Museum almost every day to research samples and transcribe books. During his time abroad, he befriended several famous European scientists, as well as Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the Chinese revolutionary and first president of the Republic of China. After returning to Japan, he devoted his life to collecting species in Wakayama. A highlight of his career came when he was summoned by Emperor Hirohito (1901–1989), a keen biologist, to teach him about slime molds.