

Stone *Nio* Statues

Bungotakada is home to approximately 140 stone statues known as *nio* or *kongorikishi* and is among the cities with the highest number of such statues in Japan. These statues are characterized by their muscular bodies and fierce facial expressions and are usually found at the gates of Buddhist temples, where they ward off evil spirits and demons. They are usually found in pairs—one with its mouth open (*agyo*), and the other with it closed (*ungyo*).

Geological elements of the Kunisaki Peninsula include andesite and tuff, both indigenous volcanic rocks which were often used by Buddhist sculptors and stonemasons to make *nio* statues. Most of the *nio* statues found in Bungotakada date back to the Edo period (1603–1868) and were designed and created with a freestyle approach, such that each one has its own unique character. Visitors can embark upon a *nio* statue stroll and search for the many guardians in the area, each with its own distinct facial expression.