

Daisen-Oki National Park: History and Culture

The park's natural diversity is complemented by many historical sites that hold great religious and cultural significance. The land itself is the subject of one of Japan's earliest myths: standing upon the Shimane coast, the god Yatsukamizu Omitsu pulled four pieces of land from across the Sea of Japan, anchoring them with two great stakes that became the mountains of Daisen and Sanbe. This land formed the Shimane Peninsula.

The peninsula is considered sacred, as signified by the presence of Hinomisaki Shrine, which enshrines the sun goddess, Amaterasu, and her brother, Susanoo. To the east, Miho Shrine is dedicated to Ebisu, patron of fishermen and god of music and prosperity. Each of these deities forms part of the mythological and cultural tapestry that has defined life in this region since before recorded history.

Outside of their role in the area's creation myth, several of the park's mountains are also sacred sites. Daisen was the subject of native mountain worship even before the establishment of Daisenji Temple in 718. By the Edo period (1603–1867), Daisenji had become a flourishing site of worship for the Buddhist deity Jizō Bosatsu, with a heavily traveled pilgrimage route that also spawned one of the country's largest livestock markets.

The Oki Islands have played a significant role in the region's cultural history as well. Beginning in 724, the islands served as a place of exile for emperors and noblemen who had been banished from the imperial court. Emperor Go-Toba (1180–1239) and Emperor Go-Daigo (1288–1339) both passed years of exile there, and during his time on the island, Go-Toba continued to pursue his passions of poetry and swordsmithing. His legacy persists today in the fine blades and poetry collections he left behind.