

### **Unzen Onsen Town Religious History Trail: Christianity and Conflict**

Around Unzen there are many Buddhist statues whose heads are missing or have obviously been reattached. These statues are reminders of the violent religious clashes that have taken place during Unzen's history. In 1549, Portuguese traders arrived in Kagoshima, bringing with them not only firearms and silk, but also Christian missionaries. In a few decades, tens of thousands of Japanese had converted. The speed at which the religion spread led many to believe that Japan would become Asia's first Christian country, but it was not to be.

Tensions grew between the newly converted Christians and followers of the country's two established religions, Shinto and Buddhism. The lord of Shimabara, Arima Harunobu (1567–1612), became a Christian in 1579 and soon after ordered the destruction of the Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples within his lands. This deeply offended those still faithful to the old religions, and—coupled with the fear of Western colonization—caused a violent backlash against Christianity.