

### **Unzen Onsen Town Religious History Trail: The End of Christianity in Japan**

This cross is a monument to the Christian martyrs who were killed here in the early 1600s. Built during the Meiji era (1868–1912), it commemorates the approximately 33 Christians who were tortured and killed in the boiling waters of the *jigoku* hot springs of Unzen.

When Christianity first came to Japan in the middle of the sixteenth century, hundreds of thousands of people converted to the new faith. But by the 1580s, Christianity had come to be seen as an evil religion that tempted the Japanese populace away from their native faiths and made the country vulnerable to invasion or colonialization by the West. After the ban on missionaries in 1587 and the crucifixion of 26 Christians in Nagasaki only 10 years later, tens of thousands of Christians renounced their faith. Those who refused were tortured and put to death.

The final chapter of Christianity in premodern Japan occurred here on the Shimabara Peninsula. The Matsukura clan, which replaced the Christian Arima clan in 1616, levied heavy taxes on the peasant population to fund the construction of a new castle. The new clan also enacted various punishments on the local Christian population. Feelings of anger and resentment built until a famine finally sparked the Shimabara Rebellion in December of 1637. Almost the entire population of the peninsula rose up in arms, joined by masterless samurai and Christian peasants from the Amakusa Islands. However, more than 120,000 shogunate troops from across Kyushu came to crush the rebellion. By April of 1638, tens of thousands of Christian men, women, and children had been put to death, and the rebellion was over.