

**Audio Guide: Onsen-jinja Shrine**

After following the road north for several minutes, you will come to the center of town. Once you see a stone torii gate to your right, stop—you have reached Onsen-jinja Shrine.

Also known as Shimengū, the shrine was founded in 701 as a part of the same temple-shrine complex as Manmyōji. This is the head shrine of the Oshimen, four gods associated with Shinto who are worshipped across the Shimabara Peninsula as protectors of the region and its hot springs.

Shimengū was affected by another period of religious tension in Unzen. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the new Meiji government sought to undo the centuries of tradition by which Buddhist deities were interpreted as Shinto gods and worshipped together—often in the same place. Shimengū was forcibly separated from Manmyōji and given a new name to separate it from what was then seen as the “foreign” Buddhist influence.

After World War II, its original name was restored. The people who live in Unzen tend to also call the shrine by its nickname, Oshimen-san. The religious separation, however, was never resolved, and throughout Japan today, Shinto and Buddhism are seen as completely distinct traditions.