

Audio Guide: Manmyōji

Turn around and go south, back down the street. You will see a flight of steps leading up a hill. This is the entrance to Manmyōji, Unzen's oldest and most important temple.

Nearby, you will see a stone pillar bearing several names for this temple and the mountains it honors. One of these is "Mt. Unzen," which was written using the kanji characters that are commonly read as "Mt. Onsen" ("onsen" being the modern Japanese word for hot spring). In fact, these were the original characters used to write "Unzen," but when the area was made into a national park in 1934, the government chose new characters to avoid confusion with the other *onsen*. The new kanji characters can still be read as "unzen," but they mean "mystical land in the clouds."

The Unzen Mountains were once known simply as "Nihon-san," or Mt. Japan. When crossing the ocean from China, the mountains of the Shimabara Peninsula were the first that many sailors saw as they approached their destination—Unzen was the sign they looked for to make sure they had made it home.

Climb the steps and take a moment to enjoy the view of the town. Again, you can see the traditional architectural elements that tie the town together—white walls and red-tiled roofs inspired by Unzen's original inns. Many of these were built in the early twentieth century, when wealthy Westerners living in Shanghai and beyond began to visit Unzen as a summer resort destination.