

### **Chichibu ga Ura Park**

The Shimabara Peninsula has been shaped by natural disasters for thousands of years. Nowhere is this clearer than in the city of Shimabara, where the most dramatic changes took place during the Shimabara Catastrophe of 1792.

Beginning in 1791, the western side of the Shimabara Peninsula near the town of Obama was shaken by a series of earthquakes. In early 1792, the seismic activity moved east, and the whole cluster of mountains in the center of the peninsula seemed to awaken as lava erupted from multiple points and slowly filled the valleys between them. Finally, after months of agitation and a final spurt of earthquake activity farther east, the 4,000-year-old lava dome of Mt. Mayuyama (819 m) collapsed in a massive avalanche of debris.

More than 15,000 people across the region were killed in the landslide and the tsunami that followed as huge parts of the mountain tumbled into the Ariake Sea. The town of Shimabara was suddenly covered with many small hills; other pieces of Mt. Mayuyama formed scattered islands in the sea, and the harbor became much shallower as it filled with debris.

Here at Chichibu ga Ura Park, you can reflect on the unique landscape created by this natural disaster. Though it brought tragedy, the earthquake resulted in unexpected blessings as well: fresh spring water emerged from cracks in the new earth, and the newly complex landscape beneath the sea became an abundant habitat for sea life.