

## Yakuinbaru Fountains

The Aso caldera area is filled with fountains that flow with fresh natural spring water. This is due to the area's artesian aquifer, a permeable geologic layer positioned between layers of impermeable rock. The intense pressure exerted on the water in the aquifer causes it to spout out, creating natural fountains. Local residents have been drinking this clean, delicious water for centuries, as well as using it to irrigate their agricultural land.

## *Hitaki Shinji* Fire Ritual

Shimo Jinja Shrine is known for the practice of *hitaki shinji*, an ancient fire ritual. The ritual, which takes place from August 19 to October 16, is performed to appease a vengeful spirit named Kihachi, who would bring frost to the rice fields and damage the crops if left without a warming fire. Traditionally, a young girl was chosen to remain in the shrine hall and keep the fire lit for 59 days while offering prayers to the spirit. The tradition continues to the present day, though local residents now take turns keeping the fire lit.