

Kirishima Higashi Shrine

Kirishima Higashi Shrine is located halfway up the eastern side of Mt. Takachihonamine, deep in an ancient forest.

The shrine was established during the reign of Emperor Sujin, the tenth emperor of Japan. Rebuilt in its entirety in 1722, the shrine buildings have since undergone occasional repair work, most recently in 1997.

Mt. Takachihonamine's summit is part of the shrine grounds. According to legend, one of the shrine's treasures, the legendary spear Amanosakahoko, was brought here by the deity Ninigi-no-mikoto, grandson of the sun goddess Amaterasu and believed to be the great-grandfather to the first emperor of Japan.

The Kirishima mountains have long been revered as training grounds for followers of Shugendo, an ancient form of asceticism that combines beliefs from mountain worship, Buddhism, Shinto, and Taoism. Shugendo is associated with Kirishima due to the influence of the Buddhist priest Shoku (910–1007), who spent four years in these mountains. He later founded a temple near an established shrine, leading to an influx of Shugendo practitioners.

Statue of Shoku

Shoku (910–1007) was a revered Buddhist priest who spent four years in the Kirishima mountains and founded Shiratori Shrine. This statue, unveiled in 2006 to honor the thousand-year anniversary of his death, was carved to resemble Shoku as he might have appeared upon his arrival in Kirishima.

Amanosakahoko, the Legendary Spear

According to the Japanese creation myth, the god Izanagi-no-Mikoto and goddess Izanami-no-Mikoto stirred the primeval oceans with the Amanosakahoko spear before plunging it into the island created from droplets that fell from the tip of the spear. The large bronze *hokoyari*-style spear on the mountaintop was erected during the Edo period (1603–1867) by mountain ascetics (*yamabushi*) training in the Kirishima mountain range.

Shamon Shrine Crest

Kirishima Higashi Shrine's crest features a Buddhist dharma wheel, a reminder from a time when the shrine shared its grounds with nearby Shakujoin Temple, which is now closed. Both

the temple and Shugendo mountain asceticism suffered during the early Meiji era (1868–1912), when government policies instituted the separation of Buddhism and Shinto. The crest illustrates the close connection between the two belief systems in the Kirishima area, as shrines that use Buddhist crests are exceptionally rare.