

### **Nishi-nakama Village**

This small settlement embodies the traditions, beliefs, customs, and ways of living in harmony with nature that characterize many of the villages on Amami Oshima and throughout the Amami Islands.

### **A Spirit Road and Old Ways**

The *kami-michi*, or spirit road, is said to be the route that the spirits of the mountains take to the sea. In keeping with traditional beliefs, local residents carefully maintain this narrow path that runs through the village and treat it with reverence. There is still a strong belief in animism in the Amami Islands, and villagers seek to live in harmony with the spirits that reside in all elements of the natural world.

### **Respect for the Natural World**

When entering the forest around Mt. Sumiyo, most villagers say a prayer to the spirits to ask for protection. It is also customary for villagers to offer thanks when taking wood from the forest or freshwater prawns and Ryukyu sweetfish from the Sumiyo River. The tradition of catching Japanese mitten crab (*mizugani*) has been carried on for at least two centuries and is still an important part of village life, though the crabs' numbers have declined over the years. During the village's Honensai Harvest Festival, held annually on August 15 of the traditional calendar, villagers express their gratitude for nature's gifts and offer up prayers to ward off evil.

Nishi-nakama is part of Amami Gunto National Park, which was established in 2017 to protect the delicate ecosystem of the Amami island chain.