

Nachi Waterfall and Hiro-jinja Shrine

Nachi Waterfall is the tallest single-drop waterfall in Japan. Its waters plunge in a stream that is 13 meters wide at the top to a basin 133 meters below. The thunder, spray, and sheer scale of the cascade inspired such awe and reverence that it became a place of worship, and was eventually formalized as Hiro-jinja Shrine. The shrine has no worship hall, so devotees say their prayers facing the waterfall, which is the shrine's *shintai*, the entity in which the deity resides.

The Otaki Haisho (Place of Prayer at the Waterfall) offers a slightly elevated view of the falls and the virgin forest to its right. Visitors are welcome to drink water drawn from the basin at the bottom of the falls, which is said to impart longevity.

Worship and Tradition

The deity worshiped here year-round is Hiro Gongen, identified with Onamuchi-no-Mikoto, the kami of connections and marital harmony. As Hiro-jinja is a branch shrine of Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine, the deities worshiped there are carried here each July 14 for a one-day “homecoming” as part of the grand shrine’s Fire Festival.

Nachi Waterfall’s beauty made it sacred, and that sacredness is why its beauty was protected and can still be enjoyed today.