

Red and White Beaches on the Nachi Coast

Like the rest of the Kumano Kodo area, the coastline of Nachi-Katsuura is rich in sites of legend and lore. Akairo-no-Hama and Shiragiku-no-Hama are two such locations north of the city.

Akairo-no-Hama: Red Beach

The shore of Nachi Bay by the mouth of the Kujino-kawa River is known as Akairo-no-Hama (Red Beach). According to local lore, the sand here is red because of an ancient battle between Jimmu, the legendary first emperor of Japan, who had just arrived in Kumano, and the armies of Nishikitobe, a local chieftain who was trying to drive him off. So fierce was the battle that the bloodshed dyed Nishiki Beach permanently red. Out of respect for this valorous resistance, Nishikitobe is still venerated at Kumano Sansho Omiwa-yashiro Shrine. Not far from the river is the Koshikake-ishi (Sitting Stone), a throne-shaped boulder said to be the place where Emperor Jimmu rested after the battle.

Shiragiku-no-Hama: White Chrysanthemum Beach

Shiragiku-no-Hama (White Chrysanthemum Beach) is located on Kuji-no-Ura Bay. Chrysanthemums grow on the beach, but the name also refers to the legend of Princess Shiragiku. According to tradition, the princess was a maidservant of Koremori, a commander of the Taira clan, which was overthrown during the Genpei War of 1180–1185. The epic *Tale of the Heike*, an account of the struggle, includes an encounter near Mt. Koya that inspired Koremori to enter the priesthood. He then makes the pilgrimage to Kumano, sets sail from Hamanomiya, and drowns himself at sea.

Local legend adds more to the story: Princess Shiragiku arrived in Kumano shortly afterward, roaming the Kumano Kodo in search of her former master. She finally arrived at the village of Ukui, where a villager explained what had happened. Devastated, she built a hut for herself on the beach, and spent the rest of her life praying for Koremori. The beach was named after her.