

Shirakami Shrine: Coastal Rocks

Shirakami Shrine stands out among the office blocks and hotels that surround it in the middle of Hiroshima's central business district. But while the shrine's stature and brilliant white adornments catch the eye, it is the craggy outcrop of large rocks beneath its two main buildings that makes the shrine unusual for one so centrally located. That foundation is a clue to both the shrine's and the city's history.

When Shirakami Shrine first became a site of worship, it was on a coastal island—one of many in Hiroshima Bay. The rocks that support it once extended deep below the waves, posing a serious hazard to passing ships. The shrine acted as a kind of early lighthouse, with eye-catching white paper in place of a lamp.

The shrine was officially established in 1594, when Mohri Terumoto (1553–1625), the local daimyo lord, took over Hiroshima Castle. Having effectively founded a new city, Mohri started reclaiming land from the bay to expand his territory. Mohri's land reclamation program joined Shirakami Shrine to the mainland, rendering its rocks harmless to ships. Over time, the city spread well beyond the shrine, enveloping it.