

Suga-jinja Shrine

Since the late nineteenth century, Shinto rituals to venerate the sacred island of Okinoshima have been held at Suga-jinja. Every May before the rice planting season begins, local people gather at the shrine to pray for good health, offering rice and vegetables on an altar, and praying with the priests in the direction of the island, where one of the Three Female Deities of Munakata is enshrined.

According to local lore, the tradition began after an outbreak of dysentery in 1890. Some members of the community traveled to Okinoshima to pray for an end to the illness. Soon after, the people began to recover, and the spread of the illness halted.

After this miraculous recovery, it became common to venerate Okinoshima from a lookout on Mt. Arai (249 m), the mountain nearest to Suga-jinja Shrine. Over time, people began to worship the island from the grounds of the shrine instead of climbing the mountain. A stone altar next to a set of two stone steps faces toward Mt. Arai and Okinoshima. Visitors can stand on the steps to get a better view of the peak of Mt. Arai.

As a measure against future outbreaks, the people of Tebika, the village around Suga-jinja Shrine, introduced a system of collective medical aid. Villagers contributed a percentage of their rice harvest each year to hire a doctor who served the community.