

Remote Worship in Munakata

Okinoshima is a sacred island off the coast of Munakata. Access is restricted to a handful of Shinto priests who serve there. For people to worship the deity enshrined at Okitsu-miya Shrine on the island and the sacred island itself, they must engage in remote worship (*yohai*).

The practice of remote worship is common in and around Munakata, where the Three Female Deities of Munakata (enshrined at Hetsu-miya, Nakatsu-miya, and Okitsu-miya Shrines), have been revered for over a thousand years. Worship halls like the one at Okitsu-miya Yohaisho on the island of Oshima have been built at some locations, but many *yohai* spots around Munakata are simple vantage points, on mountaintops or beaches, with a clear view of the sacred island. There are several *yohai* spots around Munakata, including points along the Satsuki Matsubara Promenade.

Until the mid-twentieth century, ceremonies to honor the deities of Okinoshima were commonplace, especially in coastal areas. Farmers would make offerings of food and sake at a *yohai* spot, to give thanks for a successful rice planting season and to pray for a good harvest and good health. Although these formal ceremonies are now rare, people from the area still visit these spots to offer prayers.