

## Unzen Hell

This hellish landscape of steam-wreathed boulder fields, with boiling water and pungent sulfurous gases spouting up from the earth, is where Matsukura Shigemasa (1574–1630), the lord of Shimabara, came up with the idea of using the boiling water as an instrument for persecuting the local Christian population. At first, he had them boiled to death in the pools; later, he had boiling water poured over their exposed flesh in small increments to force them to renounce their faith. The euphemism for being sent to Unzen for punishment was the innocuous-sounding *yama ni iru* (“to go to the mountains”).

Today, a raised walkway crosses the area. Three memorials stand in honor of the 33 Christian martyrs who perished here between 1627 and 1631: the Monument of the Sacred Flame, an upright stone carved with a line of poetry by the poet Ikuta Chosuke, erected in 1939; a cross from 1961 marked with the names of the six Japanese martyrs who perished at Unzen and were beatified in 1867 by Pope Pius IX; and a tablet carved on a rock in 2011 featuring the names of the Unzen martyrs among the 188 Japanese martyrs beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008.

In the opening scene of Martin Scorsese’s 2016 movie *Silence* (2016), Christovao Ferreira, the apostate Portuguese priest played by Liam Neeson, witnesses the torture of Japanese believers here. (The scene was actually shot at Taiwan’s Gengziping hot spring.)