

The Cave of Jihei

Jihei—also known as Jihei Kintsuba (Jihei of the Gold Sword Guard), as well as by his baptismal name, Tomás de San Agustin—was a Japanese priest in 1614, when the shogunate promulgated the edict banning Christianity throughout Japan. He initially responded to the ban by fleeing to the Philippines, but at some point (the precise date is unclear), he managed to slip back into Japan and resume preaching in secret. This remote cave is believed to be one of the places where he hid from the authorities. In 1637, Jihei was captured near Nagasaki and martyred. According to legend, he was working at the stable of the Nagasaki Magistrate's Office at the time—hiding in plain sight! He was one of the 188 Japanese martyrs beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008.

The cave is a 40-minute walk from the nearest parking lot. The route follows a stream at the bottom of a lush valley, making this a pilgrimage of healthy exercise and fresh air. Visitors are advised to go with a guide to avoid the risk of getting lost.