

Historical and Cultural Sites in Ise-Shima

Ise-Shima National Park is Japan's spiritual heartland, with a long history and deep cultural roots. It is the home of Ise Jingu—the country's foremost *jinja* (Shinto shrine)—and a number of other important sites.

Ise Jingu's traditions have been handed down over a history of more than 2,000 years. The shrine is dedicated to the kami (Shinto deity) Amaterasu Omikami, and is surrounded by a sacred forest known as the Kyuikirin, which gives the complex a tranquil atmosphere.

Mt. Asama is the highest point in the park at 555 meters. Near the peak stands Kongoshoji, a Buddhist temple that was founded in the sixth century. The approach to the inner sanctuary of Kongoshoji leads through a cemetery of *sotoba*, wooden grave markers up to eight meters tall.

Meoto Iwa (Wedded Rocks) are two sacred rocks that jut out of the sea just off the coast. They are connected by a *shimenawa*, a rope that in the Shinto tradition acts as a division between the physical and spiritual realms. The rope is replaced three times a year in a ritual called Oshimenawahari Shinji.